



Students' Society of McGill University
Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

Environment Commissioners
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TO: The Board of Governors of McGill University

CC: The Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility of McGill University

Dear Members of the McGill Board of Governors,

As Environment Commissioners for the Students' Society of McGill University, our mandate is to promote sustainability within the SSMU and for the benefit of its members. Additionally, we strive to advance environmentally and socially ethical practices in the wider community. Thus, we are proud to lend our voices in supporting Divest McGill's goal to encourage McGill University's divestment from the harmful fossil fuel industry.

As you know, climate change is an immediately relevant issue with widespread impacts, many of which are already being felt around the world. Since the Industrial Revolution, anthropogenic carbon emissions have been increasing rapidly, causing atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations to rise to 394 ppm, well over the 350 ppm limit widely advocated by the scientific community. As a result, severe weather events have increased in both intensity and frequency, ocean levels are rising and biodiversity is decreasing. Impacts such as these tend to cause the most significant harm and suffering to those who have historically contributed the least to climate change. As a country that has benefited greatly from economic development at the expense of environmental degradation and pollution, we must accept the responsibility to act in the best interests of the global community.

Of course, the rate of climate change is largely accelerated by the burning of increasingly less energy dense fossil fuels. Bill McKibben's article *Global Warming's Terrifying New Math*¹, outlines how the fossil fuel industry has 2,795 Gigatons of fossil fuels in reserve. Within the scientific community there is a strong consensus that 2°C is the greatest amount of warming that the planet can experience before irreversible damage occurs; this amount of warming corresponds to the burning of 565 Gigatons of fossil fuels, meaning that 80% of the known fossil reserves must stay in the ground to avoid climate catastrophe. Regardless of this immutable fact, fossil fuel companies continue to carry out exploratory

¹ <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>

projects to search out ever less-accessible deposits.

The Alberta tar sands are a massive project with enormous impacts. Already, extensive areas have been deforested, species have been put at risk, and water has been polluted. The impacts have especially been felt by the Aboriginal communities living in region, who must must fight for their treaty rights to be recognized as they are poisoned by the destruction of the lands they live upon. The pipeline expansion projects are particularly troubling; if they are completed, incentives to develop more renewable energies in Canada will be severely reduced. By divesting from the tar sands, we can declare that we support the necessary shift away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energies and a more livable future for local and global communities.

We wholeheartedly support Divest McGill, and hope that McGill divests of its holdings in fossil fuel companies in the near future. We believe that this is an important movement and that McGill can be a leader in society by taking action as one of more than 250 universities with active divestment campaigns.

In solidarity,



Cameron Butler



Kristen Perry

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