

## GETTING OUT OF NEUTRAL: HELPING B.C. COPE WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

“Taking the climate change science seriously implies a major transformation in how we live, work, and play within a generation, and therefore challenges the core assumptions upon which we have built our economy and our society.”

‘Climate Justice’ may be the new catch phrase for the century. A fitting term, given that climate change is the social problem of the century. It refers to climate change policy and social policy integrated with social justice. Kenneth I. Carlaw, Associate Professor of Economics, is part of a team that is bringing this concept to the forefront of public policy, and equally important, public thought.

Carlaw is a leader in a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded project that looks at several areas of concern for British Columbia’s social and economic policy. Four streams make up the project: Carbon Pricing, Community Resilience, Communication, and Industrial and Employment Strategies, the last being Carlaw’s area of expertise.

All four streams are intertwined and, when researched together, the result is an inclusive, systematic approach to climate change.

Climate change presents lots of uncertainty about perspective, time, and scope of required social change. As a result, most governments are currently reacting to climate change in a piecemeal and ad hoc way, an approach that Carlaw seeks to change.

“If you really want to have impact, then you have to look at this issue as it is: a complicated, systemic issue. You can’t solve it by simply changing a price. By understanding the nature of the problem holistically, you can have a much greater impact.”

The research team seeks to convince the B.C. Government to approach climate change in a way that is inclusive of social issues, presenting policy and project recommendations based on their findings.

Carlaw is determining the feasibility and benefits of “green” jobs— jobs that are ecologically neutral in terms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions—by examining B.C.’s industrial carbon footprint and considering the potential future industrial composition of the province.

“We are doing a lot of methodological thinking and soul searching about the concept of green jobs. The greener we

produce, the greener the jobs, and the greener we are in terms of the way we live, keeping in mind the social and economic costs of going green,” says Carlaw.

The complexity of the issue requires a thoughtful approach that will produce a coherent strategy integrating production and consumption.

“There is a lot of passion for the subject,” he says. “You have many different experts coming together to discuss one very complex topic. All of these different opinions may be tough to manage, but it is inclusive.”

And, although the project advocates for a systemic and comprehensive policy on climate change, people are at the heart of the matter.

“If it’s not about people there is no point,” says Carlaw. “Climate change is a people problem: ultimately people are the producers and the consumers that have created the GHG associated with climate change. People have to understand that everything is connected locally, regionally, and globally when it comes to this issue.”

Although climate change is commonly associated with mitigation, Carlaw sees the problem more broadly as one of social transition and reaction.

For the most part, climate change is an accepted fact. If this is the case, then what actions can we take on an individual and collective level?

Individually, we need to understand how we can change behaviours to reduce our contribution to the problem, he says.

“Climate change will change the way many people live, regardless of where they are or what they do. The expectation is that whole communities will have to dissolve and re-emerge somewhere else. From a socially sustainable perspective, we need to consider how we will help and interact with people who are affected and require support.”



