



The Maritime Conference
The United Church of Canada
L'Eglise Unie du Canada

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NEWS RELEASE

LIMITING THE DESTRUCTIVE IMPACTS OF THE ALBERTA TAR SANDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – October 11, 2011

Sackville, New Brunswick- Expansion of oil sands production in Alberta should be rejected in favour of a clean and sustainable national energy policy according to Maritime Conference of The United Church of Canada. The regional arm of the largest Protestant denomination in Canada says a clean energy policy must be based on conservation, efficiency and renewable energy while upholding principles of ecological sustainability and Indigenous Rights.

The conference notes conditions that should be met include adequately funded, scientifically reviewed monitoring to determine the industry's impact on the water, ecosystems and human health. The rights of Indigenous People affected by tar sands developments, specifically treaty rights, and the right to free, prior and informed consent must also be respected and enacted.

"What we really want to see is for Canada to take a leadership role and make a major shift toward a sustainable and just economic policy," says Laura Hunter, Conference Minister for Justice and Stewardship. "The human rights violations, particularly the rights of aboriginal peoples, and the ecological destruction that accompany the current fossil fuel dominated energy economy have got to stop."

The United Church of Canada is one of 11 Canadian denominations and agencies that as members of the ecumenical group KAIROS seeks a positive role in the care of God's creation, right relations among peoples, and economic justice – all of which raise major questions about the tar sands.

Maritime Conference names several areas of concern:

Ethical- Human beings are inextricably part of and dependent upon the natural world in which human activity is having increasingly destructive impacts. We recognize God's call to live with respect in harmony with the one Earth community of which we are a part, to draw responsibly upon the Earth's sustenance, and to care for it that all may benefit equitably now and in the future.

Climate Change-Tar sands oil has a clear, unacceptable relationship to the threat of climate change through deforestation, other habitat destruction and greenhouse gas production from its extraction and processing, and greenhouse gas production in its end use.

Water- The tar sands development is extracting and contaminating vast quantities of water. The majority of the water used for mining comes from the Athabasca River and at least 90% of the fresh water used winds up in enormous toxic tailings ponds. Tailings ponds seep, and while the exact amount of seepage is not known, modeled estimates suggest that 11 to 12.6 million litres of tailings leak from the ponds each day.¹ There have been documented increases in toxins such as naphthenic acids, mercury and arsenic in the Athabasca River and the river delta downstream from the tar sands.²

Human Health and Indigenous Rights-In the First Nations community of Fort Chipewyan, located downstream from the tar sands on the Athabasca River, the incidence of cancer is about 30% higher than the provincial average.³ Tar sands tenures are granted without consultation with First Nations on whose lands they are located. Three lawsuits launched by First Nations affected by tar sands development allege that First Nations were not consulted properly before tar sands tenures were granted. Inhabitants of Fort Chipewyan are engaged in legal and public information campaigns calling for a moratorium on tar sands development.

Maritime Conference is taking the following actions:

Writing letters to the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Natural Resources, and the Premier of Alberta;

Informing the public of these issues through the media;

Developing an educational resource produced by the Maritime Conference Church in Action Committee to be made available to local congregations and presbyteries;

Raising awareness of theological, ethical and environmental issues surrounding the Tar Sands.

Maritime Conference of The United Church of Canada encompasses New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, the Gaspe coast of Quebec, and Bermuda. More than 80,000 members call the United Church their home denomination in this region, worshipping in 519 congregations.

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For more information, contact Laura Hunter, Conference Minister for Justice and Stewardship at lhunter@marconf.ca

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1. *11 Million Litres a Day: The Tar Sands Leaking Legacy* by M. Price; and *Environmental and Health Impacts of Canada's Oil Sands Industry* by Royal Society of Canada.
2. Erin N. Kelly, David W., Schindler, Peter V. Hodson, Jeffrey W. Short, Roseanna Radmanovich and Charlene C. Nielsen. *Oilsands development contributes elements toxic at low concentrations to the Athabasca River and its tributaries*, 2010.
3. Yiqun Chen, Alberta Cancer Board 2009. Cancer incidence in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta 1995-2006.