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Even Ferries Need to Fight Climate Change

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More than 80% of British Columbia's carbon emissions come from burning and producing fossil fuels. That is why any plan for carbon neutrality cannot omit the diesel fuel burning BC Ferry Fleet. Domestic marine emissions accounted for about 2.5 million tons of carbon released into the atmosphere in 2005; that was about 4% of overall emissions for the province. However, BC Ferries has been exempted from provincial legislation that sets targets for emission reductions.

If we are serious about mitigating our impact on the climate, serious about reducing emissions, we have to include all major polluters in our plans. BC Ferries should be no exception. Although the company is making some effort in the right direction, if they were held to the same standard as other public services the potential for even greater gains exists.

For example, there is technology that can be added to the engines of older ferries in the fleet that can help optimize the fuel efficiency of the ships. Yet, because these modifications are not supported by the manufacturer of the engines, the corporation is hesitant to pursue these efficiencies. If the company was faced with a government directive requiring greater emission reductions, they would have the incentive to make these modifications to their fleet.

Environment Canada and BC Ferries worked together to develop an emissions reduction system which was very successful in reducing harmful pollutants from the exhaust of the ferries on which it was tested. Nitrous oxide emissions were reduced by as much as 20% and particulate matter was cut by almost 20% during the study.

The International Ship-owners Alliance of Canada recently

outlined how they wish to include ocean going vessels in the attempt to reduce Green House Gases by using better fuel and other initiatives. They also believe that deep sea shipping and BC Ferries should not be exempt. From electric plug-ins to hull and fuel efficiencies, ships must be included. When it comes to cleaning up the airshed in the lower-mainland or the coast in general, our ferry fleet must be included.

These innovations must be implemented; they can't be allowed to fall by the wayside. In the fight against climate change we need to pursue every avenue possible. We can't afford to make exceptions. We also need to get creative about how we pursue other possible reductions in our fuel use and the emissions caused by the fuel.

One idea that has been mentioned by one of my colleagues, Maurine Karagianis, NDP transportation critic, is running our ferries on biodiesel. Biodiesel, like all vegetable derivatives, comes from fully renewable sources. Emissions from biodiesel are much less harmful than those produced from burning traditional, fossil-based fuels. Pure biodiesel adds no measurable amount of sulphur to the atmosphere, and produces almost half the carbon monoxide that is released from the burning of traditional diesel. Although there may be some concern with massive biofuel production, I believe that as long as it is monitored and based on sustainable agricultural practices it can develop into a sustainable fuel source.

If we are going to build a prosperous future for this province and this planet, we need to use every tool at our disposal to change our carbon footprint for the better. We owe it to ourselves and to our children. ✍

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