

# Mass Immigration or the Alberta Tar Sands Project

*Which disaster will have the greater impact on GHG emissions?*

By **TIM MURRAY**

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## Climate change obsession a justification for an open borders agenda

Canadian Green Party leader Elizabeth May has frequently said that immigration has had a “trivial” impact on Canada’s environment. The real damage is being done by the Alberta Tar Sands, she claims, and the only immigrants that we should worry about are immigrants like Royal Dutch Shell. This is the tack taken by the Green-Left and Eco-“socialist” groups like the ones that are connected to blogs like “Climate and Capitalism” and the “Green Left Weekly”: Focus almost exclusively on climate change, because it is, in May’s words, “the most urgent problem of our time.” A global issue that requires a global solution and global cooperation, something that could be hampered by all this “divisive” talk about tightening the borders to stop a population tsunami from destroying our environment. We mustn’t send out unfriendly signals to those nations we need to work with, mustn’t we? We can’t lock our front door and close the gate or our neighbours might not love us.

So while the Green-Left has declared war on the free and unfettered trade of capital and goods, it supports the corporate agenda of promoting the free and unfettered movement of cheap labour across borders. The workers, after all, have no country, do they? Thus the open-borders, corporate-friendly stance of the Green Globalists is marketed as a gesture of “international solidarity.” Solidarity with migrants but not solidarity with the indigenous labour force whose jobs are displaced or wages suppressed by their incoming foreign comrades. The native-born proletariat can surely take a hit in the cause for “Climate Justice,” can’t they? Climate change is public enemy number one.

## Whose carbon footprint is larger—immigration or the tar sands?

For the sake of argument, let’s say it is. Let’s say

that overpopulation, the collapse of biodiversity services, Peak Oil, Peak Soil, and the prospect of running out of the minerals and fuel vital to our industrial civilization is small potatoes compared to the environmental damage wrought by hydrocarbons. OK. If that is the field of battle that the Green-Left wants to play on, then let’s join them. The question then is, what impact has hyper-immigration of the kind that Canada and the United States have been subjected to in the past two decades had on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions? American analysts Leon Kolankiewicz and Steve Camarota already established some time ago that each immigrant to the United States, on average, quadruples his GHG emissions upon arrival. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mOpEnQvD1Y> While that figure would approximate the impact that immigrants to Canada have had, another question arises. In the Canadian context, how does the carbon footprint of immigrants compare to the carbon footprint of the Alberta tar sands project?

Economist John Meyer has done the math. His calculations rest on the fact that post-1990 immigration has been responsible for an additional 7 million people in Canada, and that per-capita emissions have risen very little in that period. He asserts that if a “zero-net” immigration policy (immigrants accepted equaling emigrants) had been in effect in the past two decades, the country’s population would have stabilized at 27 million. “The 7 million (inclusive of children born to immigrants) is just the difference between the 27 million ceiling that was achievable 20 years ago and the 34 million we have now.”

Nevertheless, to be conservative, Meyer works with a figure of 5 million:

In 2006 tar sands emissions were 27 million tonnes (mt) and emissions attributed to the 5 million extra people (about 2+ Toronto’s) were 120mt. Canada’s Kyoto target is 556mt. By 2012, we will probably hit 714mt—over by 28 percent—the worst performance of any Kyoto signatory save Saudi Arabia. We will be #57 out of 58. The top countries will have cut their emissions by close to 40 percent. They have stable populations. Canada has the fastest growing population in the western world courtesy of mass immigration. Saudi Arabia’s population is growing even faster, naturally.

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*Tim Murray is a writer and researcher who focuses on environment, population and research issues.*

Oil sands emissions are growing faster than immigration-based emissions. By 2012, oil sands emissions will be 75mt. Immigration's will be 154mt. Although oil sands emissions grow rapidly, they will never quite catch those from immigration-based population growth because oil production will level off and immigration policy calls for an exponential grow-forever rate of 1 percent.

So in 2050, oil sands emissions will be 350mt and immigration's will be 414mt. That is as close as it gets. Tars sands flatten after that but immigration-based emissions keep on climbing to 879mt in 2100. (If post-1990 immigration levels continue), Canada's population will then be 66 million.

### **Immigrants did not invent our lifestyle, but they aspire to it**

Meyer acknowledges that his analysis does not differentiate between the emissions of rich Canadians and those of immigrants, most of whom are relatively poor, and take a decade to climb up to the average Canadian income level. Meyer speculates that the GHG emissions of immigrants is perhaps 20 percent lower than the Canadian per capita average. But this is hardly an argument in favour of mass immigration, because even at 80 percent of the Canadian level, immigrants still generate GHG emissions, and at a rate many times higher than they did in their former countries. While immigrants did not invent our higher ecological footprint (lifestyle), they nevertheless aspire to it, as our parents or great grandparents once did in coming here. Improving one's lot, after all, is the major and fully understandable motive for those who choose to settle here. The point is not to blame immigrants but to cite immigration as the major driver of population growth, which, contrary to green perceptions, has a demonstrably negative impact on our environment. Arguably, much can be done to mitigate that damage by more efficient technologies, more conservation measures, and better planning, but it must be expected that citizens of a country with an average year round temperature of little over 5 degrees centigrade will of necessity make higher energy demands than those who

live in warmer climates. Energy efficiency and conservation cannot offset population growth indefinitely.

### **Mass immigration has despoiled at least as much land as the Tar Sands**

Mass immigration rivals the tar sands development in environmental damage in another important respect as well. Aside from thwarting the attainment of Kyoto targets, Meyer also makes the point that the land area despoiled by the tar sands development is matched or exceeded by the land area despoiled to accommodate the immigrant-driven population growth of the last twenty years---and will vastly outstrip it in the decades to come. Furthermore, Meyer notes, "... this urban sprawl has taken place on Canada's best agricultural land---not in remote boreal forest." He continues, "We are trained to see shopping malls and subdivisions as signs of progress but seen through an environmental filter, they are even uglier than strip mines and tailing ponds because they are huge resource consumers for their entire lives. Mass immigration creates more energy overhead and reduces the environmental base both in total and in per capita terms when we should be cutting overhead, conserving resources and expanding green energy production."

### **To curb carbon emissions, we must break the taboo against talking about immigration**

What is most worrisome to Meyer is that the taboo against an open and public discussion of immigration and population policy has rendered our response to a range of challenges ineffective.

As a result of the immigration no-go zone, Canada's policy formation process has, for decades, been unable to deal effectively with a host of issues from child poverty to productivity to land use to income polarization. And now immigration is short-circuiting emissions planning.

Meyer adds that the tar sands may be the poster pariah, but if real solutions are to be found to curb our appalling carbon emissions, "*the cloak of invisibility will have to be pulled from immigration.*" Immigration should be the focus of corrective action duly proportionate to its crucial impact. ■