

ECOPOLITICS PODCAST EPISODE 4.2: Axe the Tax, or Face the Facts?

Additional Pedagogical Resources

*Summary: In this episode of the Ecopolitics Podcast, our host, **Dr. Ryan Katz-Rosene**, is joined by **Dr. Kathryn Harrison** and **Dr. Andrew Leach** to delve into the intricacies of the federal carbon tax in Canada. We explore the mechanics of the carbon tax—how it sets a price on emissions and the variations in its application across provinces, and how the tax impacts consumers and add the context by examining the current political climate surrounding the carbon tax and its role in the larger debates on environmental policy in Canada. Listening to this episode will help us unpack the complexities of this politically contentious policy tool and its implications for Canadian politics and climate change initiatives.*

Key Takeaways:

- The carbon tax plays a critical role in Canada's current climate change policy, while also influencing both political discussions and public opinion.
- Communication of climate policy is an essential consideration in implementation. As an example, effective communication of the carbon tax is essential as a tax feels like a punishment that emphasizes costs and calls into question if it works, making it politically fraught (Dr. Kathryn Harrison – 13:31)
- Certain sectors and fuels are exempt from the federal carbon tax, including agricultural emissions (like on-farm fuels), heating oil, and northern aviation fuels. Large industrial emitters have their carbon pricing systems. Limiting the ability of the carbon tax to impact food and other cost of living prices for the average Canadian.
- The carbon tax applies differently across provinces:
 - It is implemented in provinces without their own carbon pricing systems that meet federal standards.
 - Provinces like British Columbia have their own carbon tax, so the federal tax does not apply there.
- The federal carbon tax is essentially a price on carbon emissions, calculated in dollars per ton, which has been increasing since its implementation in 2019. Where the Federal carbon tax applies, almost all revenue from the carbon tax is returned to Canadians in provinces through direct quarterly cheques based on average household tax bills, with adjustments for rural versus urban residents.

Discussion Questions:

- How does the carbon tax fit into Canada's broader climate change strategy and international commitments to reduce emissions?
- What factors influence public opinion on Carbon Tax? What are some of the narratives, and key talking points around the Carbon Tax?
- How should policymakers address communication and public opinion when implementing climate policy and strategies?
- What role do provincial governments play in the carbon tax framework, and how do their approaches differ across the country? What can we learn from the different approaches?
 - How should the Federal and Provincial governments be incorporated into Canada's broader climate strategy?
- How can revenues generated from the carbon tax be effectively used to support sustainable initiatives or support community impacts and transitions?
- What are some potential alternatives to a carbon tax, and how do they compare in effectiveness for reducing emissions?

Learn More About our Guests:

Dr. Andrew Leach is an energy and environmental economist and is Professor at the University of Alberta, with a joint appointment in the Department of Economics (Arts) and the Faculty of Law. He has a Ph.D. in Economics from Queen's University, and a B.Sc (Environmental Sciences) and M.A. (Economics) from the University of Guelph and recently completed an L.L.M. (Constitutional Law) from the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta. His research spans energy and environmental economics with a particular interest in climate change policies and the law. Outside of work hours, his free time is spent with his two kids, Will and Caroline, as well as cycling and arguing on Twitter.

Select articles, books, projects:

Leach, A. (2023). *Between Doom & Denial: Facing Facts About Climate Change*. Sutherland House.

Leach, A. "Canada's National Inventory Report." 2024. Accessed December 2024: <https://leachandrew.github.io/NIR/>

Leach, A., and Adams E. A. (2020) [Seeing Double: Peace, Order, and Good Government, and the Impact of Federal Greenhouse Emissions Legislation on Provincial Jurisdiction](#), *Constitutional Forum* 29 (1), pg 1-20.

Leach, A. (Oct 27, 2023). [The perils of promising a costless energy transition](#). *The Globe and Mail*.

Dr. Kathryn Harrison is Professor of Political Science, and Brenda and David McLean Chair of Canadian Studies at the University of British Columbia. She received Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Chemical Engineering before completing her PhD in Political Science. Professor Harrison has worked in the oil industry and as a policy analyst for both Environment Canada and the United States Congress. She has served as Senior Associate Dean and Acting Dean in the UBC Faculty of Arts. Harrison has published widely on Canadian and US climate policy. She is chair of the Expert Advisory Panel on climate change mitigation of the Canadian Climate Institute and a member of British Columbia's Climate Solutions Council. Harrison is a frequent media commentator on climate policy, and tweets at [@profkharrison](https://twitter.com/profkharrison).

Select articles, books, projects:

Harrison, K. (2025, 01). Poilievre Will Axe the Carbon Tax: Scrapping Canada's most effective climate policy will cost us a lot in the long run. *Maclean's*.

Harrison, K. & Janzwood, A. "The Political Economy of Fossil Fuel Production in the Post-Paris Era: Critically Evaluating Nationally Determined Contributions," *Energy Research and Social Science* 102 (2023): 13095

Harrison, K. (2013). [The Political Economy of British Columbia's Carbon Tax](#). In *The Political Economy of British Columbia's Carbon Tax*. OECD Publishing.

Harrison, K., & Sundstrom, L. M. (2010). [Global Commons, domestic decisions: The Comparative Politics of Climate Change](#). MIT Press.

Resources in the Episode:

Carbon Tax in Canada and Public Opinion

- For more information on Kathryn's research on the role of rebate programmes in public opinion: Mildenerger, M., Lachapelle, E., Harrison, K., & Stadelmann-Steffen, I. (2022). Limited impacts of carbon tax rebate programmes on public support for carbon pricing. *Nature Climate Change*, 12(2), 141–147. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-01268-3>

Carbon Pricing and Supply Chain Inflation

- Andrew cited a newly published paper by Dr. Trevor Tombe and Dr. Jennifer Winters "[From Farms to Tables: Quantifying the Effect of Emissions Pricing on Canadian Food Prices](#)" which indicates a limited impact on food supply chains.

Alternatives to Carbon Pricing

- Modelling done by [Navius Research](#) explores which Canadian climate policies will have the biggest impact by 2030 and the role of the industrial carbon pricing system.