

The Kinder-Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline as a National Interest

Is the approval of the Kinder-Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline really in the National Interest? Prime Minister Trudeau, Premier of Alberta Rachel Notley, and the National Energy Board (NEB) all say it is. Elizabeth May, head of the federal Green Party, says it is not.

In a recent article published in the [Victoria Times Colonist](#) Elizabeth May makes her case. She points to a number of reasons for rejecting the National Interest claim.

Surprisingly both UNIFOR, the largest union in the Alberta Tar Sands and the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) with 170,000 members in Alberta both oppose the pipeline. They say it would actually cost jobs. The largest number of new jobs is downstream in the U.S. or in the processing plants abroad. (No existing Canadian refinery can process the diluted bitumen known as dilbit)

In terms of the economy, one of the highly respected B.C. economists, Robyn Allan, made an in-depth study of the project. She says the claim that 15,000 Canadian jobs will result is bogus. She estimates that the number of jobs produced will likely be around 3,000.

The National Energy Board makes the claim for National Interest but says its mandate does not allow it to consider environment, employee benefits, indigenous rights or any other such factors. It is a silo whose only job is to approve pipelines.

Then there is the science. Though National Resources Canada (NRCan) supports the company's science, both the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' and the Royal Society of Canada's scientific reviews reject it. Apparently Kinder-Morgan's scientific studies and NRCan's study took place in fresh water tanks in Alberta. But there is no technology to clean up a dilbit spill in the salt water ocean.

It is safe to assume that all the parties involved in this struggle, including Elizabeth May's Green Party, have their own particular vested interests. The problems arise when individual groups or political parties try to sell their particular interest as a National Interest to be adopted by everyone. Here an illustration showing the conflict between vested interest and national interest might prove helpful.

During the last federal election Prime Minister Trudeau promised to consider a proportional representation system to replace the existing "first past the post" system and he did. He set up a parliamentary committee with input from the other parties to consider the matter. The Committee came back with its report, "*Strengthening Democracy in Canada: Principles, Process, and Public Engagement for Electoral Reform*".

It contained twelve recommendations, one of which was to implement proportional representation. This recommendation was rejected by Trudeau. He may have been advised that proportional representation would seriously weaken the vested interest of the government in power. [Later he stated](#) that there was no clear mandate to proceed and proportional representation systems would "*augment extremist voices and activist voices and promote instability in the country.*" (The downside of first-past-

the-post being that we could get a wacko Prime Minister with total power like Donald Trump and destroy our democracy.)

So is there a way of determining National Interest? I think there is but it is not by trying to integrate the positions and vested interests of all groups. That would take forever and it is unlikely to succeed. We need a much broader approach, a common ground shared by all parties. And one exists. But to recognize it we must be ready to think differently.

We must first realize that we are in a new kind of world. Scientists tell us that we have moved from the Cenozoic Era that began 65 million years ago with the death of the dinosaurs to the Anthropocene Era, the first man-made era. It began with the industrial revolution in the late 1880s. Its dominant characteristic is climate change, a change that will affect all civilization—all peoples, cultures, communities, systems, organizations and all political parties. To deal with this new reality we need a different kind of thinking. And because it is our current economic and political systems that are causing the problem we must create new systems and ways to transition to alternative systems. So how do we proceed? We begin with a distinction.

Aldo Leopold described the distinction. He was one of the earliest environmentalists and lived in the middle of the last century. I'm sure if he were alive today he would say now in our climate changing world what he said back then.

“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it ends otherwise.”

If we are to deal with the challenges of this new world of ours this approach seems like the only one that might become a true shared National Interest. The key to finding a common ground for a National Interest is the awareness that we are all standing on it.

Mike Bell, Comox Valley Climate Change Network