

J. Stephens Allan
Commissioner, Public Inquiry into Anti-Alberta Energy Campaigns
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July 16, 2021

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Mr. Allan,

Re: Public Inquiry into Anti-Alberta Energy Campaigns – Notice to Participant for Response

The David Suzuki Foundation has reviewed the draft report of the Public Inquiry into Anti-Alberta Energy Campaigns. We have the following comments on this draft report. Please note that the David Suzuki Foundation is not to be understood as formally participating in any manner in the Inquiry, for neither the mandate nor the process of the Inquiry is legitimate. The Inquiry is no more than a biased piece of political theatre.

Further, we find it grossly irresponsible that — in the midst of an ever-intensifying climate emergency — a Canadian provincial government would use a public inquiry such as this one to confuse the public and stir up more anger and polarization through divisive “us vs. them” legal and communications strategies. Rather than further polarizing public discussion on the climate crisis, this government should be working to reduce emissions from its oil and gas sector, build out its clean energy sector and create open and honest conversation with the public on the best available climate science, the scope of the climate crisis and the available solutions.

This communication addresses key errors and omissions in the draft report, and reiterates some key facts about the David Suzuki Foundation and its mission to help solve the climate emergency.

The David Suzuki Foundation is not “anti-Alberta”

For more than three decades, the David Suzuki Foundation has advocated for responsible and sustainable approaches to energy resource development. We have called for science-based policies to reduce emissions from the oil and gas sector and to diversify the Albertan provincial economy by shifting to clean, renewable energy sources.

We have consistently supported the rapid development of Alberta’s clean energy sector and workforce, recognizing that the province is well-positioned to lead in the inevitable sustainable energy future. Indeed, Alberta has among the highest renewable energy resource potential in Canada. Your report fails to mention this reality.

The David Suzuki Foundation recognized the severity of the climate crisis at its founding in 1990, and has worked tirelessly for decades to encourage a transition from fossil fuel dependence to a scientifically proven, necessary clean energy future. Does this make our work “anti-Alberta”? Of course not. The struggle of our work has nothing to do with a battle against Alberta and everything to do with a battle against an ever-worsening global climate emergency.

Thus, **the David Suzuki Foundation is not anti-Alberta. We are for resolving the climate crisis.** Everyone, no matter the province or country in which they reside, relies on clean air, water and soil to live — elements of life that the continued proliferation of fossil fuels brings further into jeopardy every day.

The David Suzuki Foundation is science-based

Your report fails to engage with established, mainstream science. Canada’s largest and fastest-growing source of carbon pollution is the fossil fuel sector. A credible inquiry would hold science as a guiding information source, not work to refute it. Canada (along with 197 other countries and the International Energy Agency) supports working to avoid catastrophic climate change and the extreme weather events and other disastrous impacts that stem from it. The goal is to eliminate carbon emissions from our energy sector within the next 20 to 30 years. Again, this concern is central to the David Suzuki Foundation’s mission.

Days before this response, a heat dome made its way from Canada’s West Coast into Alberta, reaching unprecedented temperatures and causing hundreds of sudden human deaths, dozens of devastating wildfires, scorched food crops and more than a billion “cooked” sea creatures along coastal shores. Scientists agree the climate crisis is making extreme weather events like this one more intense, deadlier, less predictable and more difficult and expensive to manage. Scientists agree that increased greenhouse gas emissions — primarily driven by the continued burning of fossil fuels — is driving the climate crisis.

This isn’t ideology. It isn’t political. This is science.

Key procedural errors and omissions plague this Inquiry and draft report

- **Unrealistic and inadequate requests for input**

The David Suzuki Foundation received a generic invitation to participate in the Inquiry on June 18, sent to a general contact email account. Your letter was not addressed to any specific staff person at the Foundation, even though names of our entire management team are listed on our website.

On June 26, we were granted access to your “Dataroom,” enabling review of a 176-page draft report (plus several appendices). You requested a response by July 16. This gave 15 business days for our team to review hundreds of pages of material before preparing a response. Further, upon receipt of all responses (of which we understand you have requested approximately 40), you’ve left yourself 10 business days to reflect this input — that is, to review responses, update / amend your document, finalize content, publish, etc. before submitting to Alberta’s minister of energy. Such sloppy and time-condensed processes place into question the sincerity, integrity and validity of this review exercise.

- **Substantive concerns about report content**

Your report references statements and actions of Dr. David Suzuki, a celebrated Canadian scientist, author, broadcaster and this foundation's co-founder. In 2012, Dr. Suzuki recused himself from any formal role or position with the David Suzuki Foundation. Dr. Suzuki does not speak for the Foundation. He now speaks simply as a much-revered citizen and elder in our society. Your report elides, suppresses and manipulates this fact.

The financial figure you cite of \$74,300 in government funding to the David Suzuki Foundation is inaccurate.

You make a point to clarify the difference between a non-profit and a charity, yet are inaccurate in assignment of these terms to the David Suzuki Foundation. The Foundation is a federally registered charity.

Funding committed for work toward preservation of the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia is labelled by your report as "foreign funding" of "anti-Alberta" campaigns. This makes no sense.

Similarly, your draft report takes issue with organizations that have missions to resolve the climate emergency — and the related need to reduce carbon emissions from Canada's largest and fastest-growing source of carbon pollution: the fossil fuel sector. Surely, responsible energy development to reduce carbon pollution to safe levels to avert catastrophic climate disruption is in Alberta's interests.

Other general concerns and closing remarks

Your report is marked by unsubstantiated conclusions and misstatements. If published, it promises to intensify polarization, divisiveness and hate — running counter to any open and inclusive dialogue that your report claims is needed. In Canada, threats of violence — even death — are a reality for many of those willing to be the most vocal in their efforts to protect nature and oppose industry and government forces that profit from irresponsible and unsustainable fossil fuel extraction. When Premier Jason Kenney's "war room" was launched, environmentalists received death threats; offices and personal property were vandalized. In 2021, using a government-backed public inquiry to advance a political agenda at the potential harm of citizens working toward a better world is a tremendously irresponsible use of \$3.5 million in taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Allan, on the final page of your draft report, there is a shift in tone that gives me hope. There, you write of Albertans and other Canadians — resource workers and ENGO employees alike — coming together, sharing dialogue and contributing meaningfully to the world we collectively sustain, as we navigate how to live a modern human life without destroying the Earth. I share this vision. Indeed, it's why I and my team at the David Suzuki Foundation work every day to find solutions to the ecological crises we face, and to communicate about them in ways that build bridges, creating a vision of a sustainable Canada in which we can all see ourselves.

You also write, “*The environmental movement, in my opinion, can and should be given credit for raising the issue of climate change, and other conservation matters, on the national agenda. But I am concerned that the discussion has become polarized and paralyzed — polarized and paralyzed to the extent that it is nearly impossible to raise questions or make suggestions that don’t align with the agenda of the ENGOS, which is often supported by media.*”

I agree that the discussion is polarized. But the question of who drives this polarization is worth deeper, more considered engagement than your report currently provides. Industry voices — extremely well-represented in government dialogues, mainstream media and through industry funded NGOs — dominate. Our foundation, meanwhile, works to create a more united, less divisive, science-based conversation about the future of our national and global economies, how we produce and consume energy, how we get around, live, work and play. Simply put: if you truly wanted to stop polarization and encourage dialogue, you would not publicly name Canadians and Canadian organizations who want to solve the climate emergency as “anti-Albertan.”

The David Suzuki Foundation supports science and what that expertise says about the human impact on climate. We support accelerating the transition to a clean energy future, including responsible and urgent action to drastically reduce carbon pollution. We support the development of Alberta’s clean energy sector. Opposition to continued proliferation of fossil fuels does not make us “anti-Alberta.” Condemnation of the David Suzuki Foundation as such is incorrect, irresponsible and dangerous.

Today, every human alive faces a worsening global climate crisis. It’s time to focus on solutions, not rhetoric.

Thank you for reading this response, Commissioner. In conclusion, the draft report is marked by unsubstantial conclusions and errors. Not only does the process and “evidence” used to produce it fail to meet any legal standard, the central framing of your inquiry is clearly and overtly biased. Should your draft report be published with this biased and manipulated narrative, it will be grossly irresponsible and will be reduced to nothing more than a two-year-long, \$3.5-million government-funded work of political theatre. I hope this inspires you to reconsider your draft report and the true terms of reference for your inquiry. Finally, I hope your energy minister has the foresight to move swiftly to the project that needs her immediate attention: diversifying Alberta’s energy economy so that your province remains a global leader in sustainable energy, contributing to the solutions and dialogue we need for Canada to emerge from the climate crisis united, healthy, safe and strong.

Sincerely,

Ian Bruce
Acting Executive Director
David Suzuki Foundation