**Introduction**

Energy—in one form or another—is essential for us to meet our basic needs and for our economy to function. As such, energy policy has always been a fundamental concern for British Columbians.

In recent years though, energy has climbed to the top of the public, political and policy agendas in our province. Provincial natural gas production has grown by 60 per cent in the past decade, construction of the Site C dam has begun, and the B.C. government is trying to develop a liquified natural gas industry. Several major heavy oil and natural gas pipeline projects have been proposed, and some are now moving ahead. At the same time, there is broad and growing concern about energy affordability, climate change, and the environmental impacts of the sector. In this context, debate surrounding the production, transportation, and use of energy has intensified.

Not surprisingly, BCGEU members are also increasingly concerned about energy issues. In response, the Provincial Executive Environment committee aims to examine and provide recommendations to update the union’s approach to energy policy.

To inform the committee’s work, the following paper outlines the union’s existing approach to energy policy, explores current issues, and identifies potential next steps for the BCGEU. The focus is on provincial energy policy, and for the purpose of this paper, energy policy is defined broadly as government measures concerned with the production, transportation and use of energy commodities.  

**Energy Policy, Climate Change and Democracy**

At the outset, it must be emphasized that energy policy is inextricably linked to climate change and the pressing need to take action to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Scientists have concluded that most observed climate change is due to human activity, most significantly through burning fossil fuels. 75 per cent of total energy use in B.C. involves burning fossil fuels, and almost 80 per cent of B.C.’s GHG emissions are generated from the energy sector. The energy used in heating and cooling our homes and businesses, mining, oil and gas extraction and production, refineries, manufacturing, and road transportation are significant sources of emissions. The overall profile of GHG emissions from B.C. in 2014 is outlined in the figure below.
Total GHG emissions from our province are lower than a decade ago (-9 per cent between 2004 and 2014), but since 2011 emissions have been trending upward again (+2.7 per cent since 2011). This dynamic is made clear in the graph below, which shows total greenhouse gas emissions from B.C. between 1990 and 2014.

![Greenhouse Gas Emissions Graph](image)

Increasingly, fossil fuels are also exported from British Columbia and burned elsewhere. For instance, in the first 10 months of last year (2016) more than 90 per cent of B.C.’s natural gas production was exported—primarily to Alberta to power the tar sands. According to a recent report, the GHG emissions embodied in Canada’s fossil fuel exports grew by 45 per cent between 2000 and 2015. By 2014, exported emissions exceeded all of the GHG emissions produced within Canada that year.

Given the central role of B.C.’s energy sector in generating GHG emissions, energy policy and climate action cannot be separated. Indeed, effective action on climate cannot be achieved without addressing the province’s energy policy.

It is also important to acknowledge the significance of energy as a public good. Our economy and nearly all aspects of our everyday lives depend on access to reliable and affordable energy. As such, trade unions from around the world (among many others) argue that access to energy should be considered a basic right, and that democratic control and public ownership of energy systems must be both protected and enhanced.

Subsequent sections of this paper will outline how our province is presently not headed in the direction of greater energy democracy. Instead, energy has become more privatized and more expensive, and B.C. is not making the progress we need towards achieving a sustainable, low carbon energy system.

### The BCGEU, Energy and Climate

The BCGEU has long been active on issues related to energy and climate change. More than two decades ago, a policy paper entitled “The economy and our environment” was adopted at the union’s 42nd constitutional convention. The 1995 paper called for a set of taxes and quotas to ensure resource sustainability, reduce pollution and ensure equity. In 2002, convention delegates resolved to push the Canadian government to meet its Kyoto commitments to reduce GHG emissions.

More recently and specifically, delegates to the BCGEU’s 2008 convention passed resolution C-65. The resolution provided direction to the union on energy issues. It read as follows:

**The BCGEU will:**
- Call for a comprehensive energy plan for B.C. that:
  - is environmentally sustainable; and
  - encourages conservation; and
  - includes non-fossil fuel sources of energy such as wind and solar; and
  - returns full public control of BC Hydro to the public sphere; and
  - protects rivers and creeks from private exploitation; and
  - does not rely on mega-projects such as the proposed Site C dam in the Peace River region.
- Call on the federal government to regulate industry, including the Alberta tar sands, to meet our Kyoto Protocol objectives.
The resolution directed the union to advocate for an overarching, coherent plan focused on environmental sustainability, energy conservation, the development of renewable energy sources, and protecting public control of energy resources.

Members reaffirmed their commitment to this approach in 2014, adopting a slightly amended version of resolution C-65. The new resolution (C-73) added that an energy plan for B.C. must also “contribute to reducing the province’s greenhouse gas emissions” and “include a just transition into green jobs for British Columbians.”

In the almost 10 years since resolution C-65 was passed, the union has been active and taken strong positions on energy-related issues. Some examples are:

- Provided support to B.C. Citizens for Public Power
- Played a central role in Green Jobs BC
- Opposed the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline project
- Signed the Save the Fraser Declaration supporting First Nations’ opposition to the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline and other similar tar sands projects
- Opposed construction of the Site C dam
- Resolved to join the international “Unions Against Fracking” initiative, including supporting an indefinite moratorium on hydraulic fracturing, and opposing further expansion of fossil fuel-based energy

These actions aligned with the policy direction established by BCGEU members at successive conventions, as well as the union’s commitments to fight for action on climate change and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

However, these decisions were not without controversy. Other unions affiliated with the BC Federation of Labour viewed the BCGEU’s opposition to pipeline projects as harmful to the interests of their members. Some BCGEU members, especially those working directly with the oil and gas industry and living in communities dependent on the sector, expressed frustration with the union’s opposition to particular developments. In their estimation, the union was not adequately considering or supporting their interests. As well, they indicated they were neither aware of nor included in the union’s decision-making process.

The passionate feedback received from affiliates and BCGEU members motivated the environment committee to examine and consider ways to update the union’s approach to energy issues.

**Energy, the Environment and the Economy: Current Trends**

A clear-eyed assessment of the current situation is needed to support an informed approach on energy policy. Since resolution C-65 was passed by BCGEU members in 2008, new developments have occurred, and the public discussion around energy in B.C. has become even more highly charged. The debate has also been clouded by political spin and multi-million dollar public relations campaigns by powerful fossil fuel corporations.

The following section provides a brief and general exploration of key trends around energy policy, climate and the economy in our province today.

**Today’s Energy Policy in B.C.**

**The LNG Dream**

For most British Columbians, the most obvious and familiar feature of the provincial government’s current energy policy is its singular focus on establishing a new liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry. The government is determined to facilitate the further development of B.C.’s natural gas resources for export to Asia.
Today, B.C. produces minimal oil, but is the second-largest producer of natural gas in Canada, responsible for generating almost one-third of the country’s marketable natural gas. Since 2001, the BC Liberals have been working to expand oil and gas production. Their 2002 Energy for Our Future: A Plan for BC outlined plans to double production by encouraging the development of unconventional resources, supporting industry investment in natural gas production and “streamlining” permitting.

Over time, the provincial government’s commitment to growing the oil and gas sector has been unwavering, and has intensified under Christy Clark’s leadership. Overall, environmental regulations have been loosened, compliance and enforcement staff reduced, and permit requirements relaxed. An impressive list of subsidies and tax credits has also been extended to the industry. In 2014, B.C.’s Auditor General noted that more than $1 billion in tax credits were given to oil and gas companies over a five year period. More recently, Clark halved the LNG tax rate (from 7 per cent to 3.5 per cent), reduced royalties and promised a 35 per cent discount on electricity rates for LNG projects.

Clark’s government has made dubious claims about “clean” energy and natural gas development. It argues that exporting natural gas to Asia will displace coal-fired production and serve to reduce GHG emissions outside of B.C. This claim lacks supporting evidence. As well, B.C. LNG has been promoted by the provincial government as the “cleanest LNG in the world.” The reality is that LNG is an energy-intensive way to move gas, with significant additional GHG emissions generated along the supply chain. In fact, according to a 2015 report, taking into account the full lifecycle emissions of transporting gas from the wellhead to Asia, burning B.C. LNG in Asia could be significantly more emissions-intensive than burning coal there in modern efficient plants.

Locally, GHG emissions from future LNG plants and the associated increases in upstream developments would be large, and would represent a likely insurmountable challenge to the achievement of B.C.’s GHG emissions reduction targets. For instance, if built, the proposed Pacific NorthWest LNG project would add about 10 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent each year to B.C.’s GHG emissions. This amount—generated from a single LNG plant—is equal to 15 per cent of B.C.’s total 2014 emissions. Finally, the ongoing and future growth of oil and gas production has an environmental impact in northern B.C., including vastly increased water consumption by the industry, and extensive land disturbance from well pads, roads, pipelines, seismic activities and facilities development.

Electricity in B.C.: Site C and Rising Rates

A second key element of the province’s present energy policy is the construction of the Site C dam. The controversial $9 billion project is moving ahead, despite resistance from First Nations and serious questions about whether the project is needed, its impacts on local farmland, wildlife and the downstream Wood Buffalo National Park, and about how investment in a massive hydroelectric project might limit infrastructural flexibility in a time of climate change.

Electricity produced from hydroelectric or other renewable sources accounts for about 25 per cent of total energy use in B.C. Certainly, B.C.’s electricity system is dominated by hydroelectricity from big dams built beginning in the 1960s. For decades BC Hydro, a publicly owned Crown corporation, provided reliable, secure and low-cost electricity to British Columbians and industry. BC Hydro also contributed billions to the province’s finances through dividends, water rentals and taxes in lieu for local government.

Beginning in 2002 the BC Liberals made significant changes to policy related to electricity. First, the government required that BC Hydro acquire new electricity from private producers, a policy shift which sparked a proliferation of run-of-river hydro projects across the province.
It is important to note that the name “run-of-river” is government and industry’s chosen terminology for these projects. The innocuous term belies the significant environmental impacts to wildlife, fish habitat and wilderness that these energy projects have during both their construction and ongoing operation. Despite their name, “run-of-river” projects do require dams to be built and involve the diversion of rivers.

Subsequently, the BC Liberals’ 2007 BC Energy Plan essentially banned coal-fired power plants, placed restrictions on natural gas generation and most importantly, required B.C. to become electricity self-sufficient.30 Framed as the solution to a supposed crisis in “energy security,” the self-sufficiency policy required BC Hydro to be able to produce enough electricity to meet B.C.’s needs even in critically low water years. Rather than managing the risk of low water by importing and storing power in its reservoirs as needed, BC Hydro instead had to purchase electricity from private producers at a very high cost. Essentially, the policy forced the utility to enter into contracts to buy more electricity than it needs in all but the driest years. Today, BC Hydro holds $58 billion in contractual obligations to buy power from independent producers over 55 years.31 The overall result for BC Hydro customers is that these “uneconomic and unnecessary” purchases are driving the need for increased rates.32

Indeed, BC Hydro’s rates have increased by 27 per cent over the past five years, outpacing inflation by more than four times and contributing to the province’s affordability crisis. Yet these increases have occurred in a context where (since 2013) the provincial government has capped rate increases below what is actually required to produce the electricity. Every year that the Crown corporation does not bring in enough revenue to cover its costs, BC Hydro’s long-term debt is growing. Over the past five years, BC Hydro’s debt has grown by 40 per cent from $12.8 billion to $18.0 billion. Eventually, the utility—and its customers—will have to deal with this debt, probably in the form of significant rate increases.33

Renewables

Ostensibly, the BC Liberals have also aimed to develop renewable energy sources beyond the province’s major hydroelectric dams, including small hydro, wind, solar, biomass, tidal, wave and geothermal.

2007’s BC Energy Plan was entitled A Vision for Clean Energy Leadership, and included $25 million to establish an Innovative Clean Energy Fund to support “pre-commercial” energy technology or commercial technologies not currently used in B.C.34 In 2008 the government released its BC Bioenergy Strategy, along with funding to establish the Bioenergy Network and support biodiesel production.35 The introduction of the carbon tax in 2008 and the requirement for public sector organizations to become carbon neutral count as important policy supports for the clean energy sector. Another key policy was the adoption of a low carbon fuel standard in 2010.

2010’s Clean Energy Act established being a net exporter of electricity as a provincial objective, a new policy direction that promised to be a boon for the clean energy sector. At the time, the executive director of the Independent Power Producers Association of B.C. praised the new legislation, saying the Act “reinforces that the clean energy sector is a star on B.C.’s economic horizon.”36

With all of this, by 2015 private power producers were generating about 20 per cent of B.C.’s electricity supply, mostly through run-of-river hydro projects. Wind made up 3 per cent of B.C.’s electricity in 2015, up from zero in 2005. Over the same time period biomass sources remained steady, supplying 5 per cent of B.C.’s electricity in both 2005 and 2015. All other renewable sources (solar, geothermal, etc.) accounted for less than 1 per cent of electric power capacity in B.C. in 2015.37 A vibrant clean technology sector has emerged in the province, although the primary market for this sector is outside of B.C.38
This trend is due to many factors, including improved energy efficiency and the closure of several pulp mills, which are large consumers of electricity. B.C. is presently in a surplus position in terms of electricity production. Indeed, given an oversupply, in 2014 BC Hydro paid millions to private power producers to not produce power.

Going forward, BC Hydro anticipates growth in demand as our population grows and there is (hopefully) more fuel-switching to clean electricity. In particular, efforts are being made by government to electrify the natural gas sector. But fundamentally, it remains that both today and in the near future, the great majority of energy use in B.C. will involve burning fossil fuels. A real transition to low carbon energy sources—and in B.C., this means using more electricity—has not yet begun.

GHG Emissions Trends and Climate (In)Action in B.C.

In November 2007, the provincial government made a commitment to climate action, and legislated GHG emissions targets for 2020 and 2050 (-33 per cent and -80 per cent below 2007 levels respectively). Interim targets were also set for 2012 and 2016 (-8 per cent and -18 per cent below 2007 levels).

Initially, emissions reductions were achieved and the province met its first target in 2012. But as already noted, B.C.’s total GHG emissions have been trending upwards since 2011. Although the specific emissions data is not yet available, B.C. will not reach its 2016 target, nor is there any real possibility the 2020 target will be met. Instead, carbon pollution is rising, and government forecasts suggest that B.C.’s emissions will grow to 83 Mt, or 32 per cent above 2014 levels by 2030. This trend is driven primarily by emissions growth in the province’s natural gas sector.

Last summer, the BC Liberals released their Climate Leadership Plan (CLP). It makes no mention of the 2016, 2020 or 2030 emissions targets, instead asserting that “B.C. is committed to reaching our
was rewritten to raise the thresholds for reviewable projects, eliminate minimum standards for environmental assessments and reduce public involvement. Amendments to the Parks Act allowed industrial research to be conducted within parks, paving the way for boundary adjustments and industrial development to occur in parks.\textsuperscript{53}

This government also acted to reduce public oversight of industry activities by moving responsibility for some professional work out of the public service. Provincial ministries and their staff were characterized as inefficient, overly bureaucratic, and focused more on “process and paperwork” than on-the-ground results. From this, a new generation of environmental laws has been created which employ some form of “professional reliance,” where qualified professionals employed by industry are relied upon to provide information and make decisions about environmental protection or resource management.\textsuperscript{54}

Together, deregulation and the devolution of important decision-making powers to professionals employed by industry have served to justify deep cuts to the ministries and agencies tasked with protecting the environment and managing our natural resources, often called the “dirt ministries.” Overall, staffing levels in these ministries have been slashed by nearly 30 per cent since the Liberals came into office in 2001, representing the loss of more than 1,600 good jobs. In terms of funding, in 2015/16, the provincial government spent fully one-third less on managing our natural resources and the environment compared to 2003.\textsuperscript{55}

The consequences of gutting the scientific and operational capacity of these important public agencies are serious. Today, there is less monitoring and enforcement of environmental regulations, and not surprisingly, growing evidence of non-compliance is emerging. Ministries’ ability to understand and manage environmental risk has been eroded, as well as their capacity to generate and share important knowledge about the environment and our resources.

\textit{Cuts to Public Oversight}

Another important issue related to energy policy is the deep cuts to environmental and natural resource management that have been made by the BC Liberals since 2001. Starting with the assumption that B.C. industries were “over-regulated” and burdened by “excessive red tape,” the BC Liberals have systematically weakened environmental laws in B.C. For example, in 2002 the \textit{Environmental Assessment Act}
British Columbians’ trust and confidence in both the ministries responsible for enforcing environmental laws and in industry have been shaken. With less information about the environment, resources and compliance with regulations available, speculation abounds about what is actually happening on the land base. In this context, the possibility of engaging in an informed and productive public debate about potential energy projects and their impacts is compromised.

Jobs, Climate Action and the Economy

B.C.’s Energy Sector

B.C.’s energy sector includes oil and gas extraction, coal and other metal (uranium) ore mining, electric power generation, transmission and distribution, natural gas distribution, petroleum refineries, pipeline transportation and related support activities. In 2014, the sector contributed just over $10 billion to the provincial economy, accounting for 6.0 per cent of B.C.’s GDP. Last year, it contributed almost $1.1 billion the provincial treasury (2.1 per cent of total revenue in 2016/17). The energy sector is capital-intensive, and provides fewer jobs compared to other industries. In 2015, the energy sector made up just 0.9 per cent of provincial employment with a total of 20,400 jobs.

The bulk of energy jobs in B.C. are in electric power generation, transmission and distribution. In 2013, for example, 3,905 people were working in the oil and gas and pipeline sectors, while 12,065 people had jobs related to electricity. Although direct employment in this sector is very small from a provincial perspective, these jobs are regionally important. For instance, direct jobs in mining and oil and gas extraction made up more than 12 per cent of all jobs in B.C.’s northeast in 2016, but only 1.2 per cent of total provincial employment.

It is worth noting that short-term jobs in the construction of energy projects have been an important part of the debate around energy issues in B.C. In general, B.C.’s experience has been that many fewer jobs have actually been created than were promised. This has been true as private energy projects have been built since 2002, and certainly in the context of Clark’s audacious LNG jobs promises. Again, however, these jobs have regional significance. For instance, recently BC Hydro counted more than 2,000 workers on the Site C project, a number that represents about 5 per cent of all employment in the northeast region.

A Growing Divide

Income inequality is growing in B.C., and workers across all sectors are facing greater economic insecurity. Over the past two decades wages have stagnated while the cost of living has increased substantially. Part-time and precarious work is on the rise. Fully one-third of the new jobs created in B.C. since the 2008-09 recession are non-permanent—meaning short-term, casual and contract work. In the past two years, self-employment has increased by 6.3 per cent (+25,000 people).

For B.C. workers outside of the lower mainland, the job market is much tougher, and has been for many years. Since the recession in 2008-09, every B.C. region except for the northeast has seen net job losses of about 5 per cent. And although overall the northeast has added jobs since 2008, last year saw sizeable losses there, and unemployment skyrocketed to 9.7 per cent in 2016 from 5.9 per cent in 2015.

Forest sector work also decreased in 2016 with 5,600 (-9 per cent) jobs lost compared to the previous year. Total forest sector employment has declined precipitously over the past two decades, meaning fewer opportunities for good resource sector jobs in communities outside B.C.’s biggest cities. In 2016, there were 31,100 fewer jobs (-34 per cent) in forestry than when the BC Liberals formed government in 2001. Employment growth in mining and oil and gas (+13,500 since 2001) has not offset these job losses.
In short, there is a growing economic divide in B.C. In the lower mainland/southwest, there are more job opportunities, but intense affordability pressures for working people. Outside of the southwestern part of the province, the jobs picture is bleak. Here, residents have good reason for their deep concern about employment and the economy.67

In this context, it is not surprising that many B.C. workers—including some BCGEU members—are anxious and skeptical about what a transition to a low carbon economy might offer to them, their families and their communities. B.C.’s resource communities are familiar with the negative impacts of the boom and bust cycle of their sectors, and with the slow economic decline that much of the province outside of Metro Vancouver has experienced over the past two decades.

A recent report about just transition policies summed up the implications of a shift to a green economy for working people:

Various studies predict the low-carbon transition will eventually create more (and better) jobs than it destroys, but, as with the impacts of technological innovation and globalization on the broader labour market, those job losses will be real, severe and provocative in the absence of policies designed to address them. To pretend climate policies will not hurt workers or to suggest simply that the benefits outweigh the costs is as short-sighted and problematic as the neoclassical argument for free trade. Workers have long been told that they benefit from free trade through cheaper consumer goods, even as jobs are lost and communities are gutted by international competition. The transition to a low-carbon economy will have similarly uneven costs and benefits.68

Despite this stark reality, B.C.’s current climate plan does not include any specific plans to support workers or communities, nor were they included in the process to develop the plan. The plan promises to create up to 66,000 jobs in transportation, agriculture and forestry over 10 years.

But these jobs are simply assumed to flow from investment and growth in certain sectors. The plan makes no mention of income supports for laid-off workers, skills training or specific policies to create new jobs in communities adversely affected by climate policies. A recent review shows that these kinds of policies are similarly absent from the climate action plans developed by our federal government, and all of the other provinces and territories.69

In sum, current provincial energy policy is deeply contradictory, especially considering the challenge of climate change and growing inequality. The province is making a major expansion of its hydroelectric capacity, but is simultaneously determined to achieve unprecedented expansion in the oil and gas sector, one of the biggest sources of GHG emissions in the province. Growing this industry promises to negate other efforts towards fuel switching and energy efficiency. Current policy also both excludes and leaves working people behind, as electricity rates continue to increase, privatization limits democratic control and plans to support workers affected by climate policies are non-existent.

Discussion: Possible Next Steps for the BCGEU

Energy policy is critically important to all British Columbians—including BCGEU members—and ordinary people need a bigger voice in these matters if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Energy issues are an area where the union can continue to play a role in advancing the interests of its members and the province’s working people more broadly. In the words of an international trade union coalition on energy:

“A transition to a truly sustainable energy system can only occur if there is a decisive shift in power away from large profit-driven corporations towards ordinary citizens and communities. Workers must have a real voice in how energy is generated and used. Energy must be recognized as a public good and basic right.”70
The challenge is significant, so it is necessary to consider what the BCGEU might realistically do going forward. The following section explores three general areas where the union might consider taking action.

**Walking the Talk: Managing Energy Use by the Union**

For more than a decade, the BCGEU has tracked the greenhouse gas emissions produced through the energy it uses operating its buildings and through its employees’ air and vehicle travel. The union has taken a wide array of actions in an effort to reduce its own emissions and improve sustainability. A few examples are:

- Incentives for employees to use energy efficient vehicles (2007)
- Appointing an Environment Officer (2007)
- Videoconferencing deployed in all BCGEU offices (2010)
- Lighting retrofits completed at 4911 and 4925 Canada Way (2012)
- Reduced use of single-pick up same-day couriers (2012)
- All copy paper and envelopes made from 100% recycled paper (achieved 2012)
- More customized email communications to members in lieu of mailing (2014)
- Began printing *The Provincial* on 100% recycled paper (2016)
- Developed a Greenhouse Gas Management Plan for the BCGEU (2016-17)

Despite these initiatives, significant emissions reductions have not yet been achieved. In fact, the union’s emissions are growing. In response, the union commissioned the development of a Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Management plan to help guide its efforts to reduce emissions, and received the final plan in February 2017. It includes strategies for improving energy efficiency in the union’s new and existing buildings, greening its procurement practices, reducing emissions from staff travel, and ideas for engaging employees in energy efficiency and other sustainability initiatives.

Fully implementing the plan and providing resources to support it will assist the union to make progress in reducing its own emissions. The BCGEU could also consider expanding its tracking of GHG emissions to include the activities of its members who are on union business. In the long run, reducing emissions can lead to cost savings. As well, taking decisive action to reduce the union’s GHG emissions further demonstrates the organization’s commitment to climate action and strengthens the union’s credibility on both energy and climate issues.

**Further Define an Alternative Energy Vision**

Many of the BCGEU’s past actions on energy issues have expressed opposition to specific energy projects. To be sure, these actions are worthwhile. A recent report on how trade unions can work to achieve energy democracy nicely articulated this point:

*Resistance against individual projects that present serious risks to workers, communities and the environment and do not meet basic energy needs is crucially important. This kind of resistance can educate the public and galvanize the movement.*

Photo: BCGEU Prince George Area Office
However, constructive action at the broader policy level is also possible and important. This requires a clear sense of the policy direction and objectives the union would like to see achieved. In other words, an alternative energy vision must be offered.

But, rather than developing a detailed and specific plan, it is probably more instructive and useful to set out a series of core principles to guide future decisions and actions on energy policy. The general principles set out in BCGEU resolutions C-65 (2008) and C-73 (2014) provide excellent fundamental principles for an alternative energy vision.

These include:

- Sustainability
- Focus on reducing GHG emissions
- Encourage conservation
- Public ownership of energy resources
- Just transition for workers
- Develop renewables

Engaging in a process to further define and expand on these principles would arm the union with a clear and defensible vision for energy policy in B.C., and serve as an effective catalyst for action.

To support this process, it would be useful to develop a better understanding of the impact a transition to low-carbon energy sources might have on BCGEU members. While some parts of our membership might benefit greatly from such a transition, others are more likely to be negatively affected: in particular, BCGEU members working directly in the oil and gas sector or living in communities dependent on oil and gas or other GHG-intensive industries. Considering these potential impacts will help with strategies to effectively address the practicalities of a future low-carbon transition for our members and their families.

**Recommendations**

The BCGEU will:

- Continue to take action to reduce the union’s own greenhouse gas emissions.
- Reaffirm the general principles laid out in past resolutions on energy policy—sustainability, reducing GHG emissions, conservation, public ownership, just transition for workers, and develop renewables.
- Develop a plan to engage with BCGEU members on energy and climate issues with the goal of refining the union’s approach to energy policy.
- Re-energize and enhance ongoing efforts to educate BCGEU members on climate change and emerging sustainability initiatives.

**Engage Members**

BCGEU members are impacted by energy policy every day. Many BCGEU members have indicated that they are concerned about energy issues and want to be more informed and involved. Within the union’s membership, there is tremendous expertise about energy, climate and environmental issues. BCGEU members should play a central role in further defining an alternative energy vision. And, any effective action on energy issues requires the support of BCGEU members.

For all of these reasons, the BCGEU should consider developing a plan to engage members on energy policy. This could involve any number of approaches, including member surveys, focus groups, interviews, workshops or other events. The union should aim to undertake a broad dialogue that includes discussion of climate issues.

Such an endeavour would facilitate a better understanding of members’ diverse perspectives and interests on energy policy, allow members to both learn and share their expertise, and to plan for action.
Endnotes

2. The BC Oil and Gas Commission’s “Major Projects List” provides details on major pipeline projects in B.C. https://www.bcogc.ca/public-zone/major-projects-centre/list At the time of writing, the OGC’s list included 6 proposed natural gas pipeline projects, and 10 potential LNG facilities. For pipelines falling under federal jurisdiction, the National Energy Board maintains a list of major projects https://www.neb-one.gc.ca/pplctnflng/mjrpp/index-eng.html B.C. projects on the NEB’s list include Kinder Morgan’s TransMountain Expansion project and Spectra Energy Transmission’s Wyndwood Pipeline Expansion project.
5. From Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 128-0009, ‘Supply and demand of primary and secondary energy in terajoules, annual.’
13. Resolution C-73: THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the BCGEU demand that the BC government support the Kyoto Protocol and urge the Federal government to meet the agreed targets; and
14. Resolution C-73 read: THE BCGEU WILL:
   • Demand the provincial government develop a long term, comprehensive energy plan for BC that:
     ○ is environmentally sustainable; and
     ○ contributes to reducing the province’s greenhouse gas emissions; and
     ○ includes a clear transition to a green economy, including a just transition into green jobs for British Columbians; and
     ○ encourages conservation and retrofitting buildings; and
     ○ includes non-fossil fuel sources of energy such as wind and solar; and
     ○ returns full public control of BC Hydro to the public sphere; and
     ○ protects rivers, lakes and creeks from private exploitation; and
     ○ does not rely solely on mega-projects like Site C.
   • Call on the government to regulate industry to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
17. Unconventional resources include coalbed methane, shale and tight gas, as well as methane hydrates off the west coast of Vancouver Island.


53 Staffing numbers based on quarterly reports received by the BCGEU from the BC Public Service Agency. Funding reductions calculated from BC Office of the Comptroller General, Public Accounts and Consolidated Revenue Fund Supplementary Schedules, 1999/2000 to 2015/16.


56 This a significant sum, albeit much less than the $1.8 billion the sector contributed five years ago. The total includes revenue from natural gas royalties, bonus bids, rents on drilling rights and leases, and other energy and minerals. From British Columbia, Budget and Fiscal Plan, 2017/19-2019/20, http://bcbudg.gov.bc.ca/2017/bfp/2017_Budget_and_Fiscal_Plan.pdf


69 Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood, Evaluating government plans and actions to reduce GHG emissions in Canada: Just transition policies.