



PRESS RELEASE

Climate and equity-focused organizations call for reform of the BC Utilities Commission

June 28, 2021, Vancouver, BC – Seven organizations, including the BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Pembina Institute, Canadian Urban Sustainability Professionals, Kambo Energy Group, West Kootenay EcoSociety, Ecotrust Canada, and Create Climate Equity, have called on the Province to re-examine the role of BC’s Utilities Commission. Our organizations are active in driving BC’s transition to a low-carbon economy, decarbonization of the buildings and transportation sectors, and advancing equitable access to energy for all British Columbians.

The above organizations have submitted recommendations to Government at a critical juncture in the regulatory cycle that governs how energy will be produced, consumed, and priced in BC for years to come. Our concern is that due to the wording of its guiding legislation and the tribunal’s interpretation of it, the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC) is ill-equipped to support the energy transition that is needed in BC.

In its current form, as a purely economic regulator that considers cost of service above all other objectives, the Commission is not allowed to approve or prescribe any expenditures that fall outside of that narrow scope — even if that prevents it from advancing other policy goals including:

- Decarbonization of BC’s energy system, consistent with legislated and sectoral emissions reduction targets.
- Electrification of key sectors of the economy, including buildings and transportation.
- Advancing equity and poverty reduction goals by ensuring all British Columbians have secure and affordable access to energy, and energy efficiency measures, regardless of the language they speak, previous life experience in Canada, or income.
- Advancing economic reconciliation and self-determination by providing Indigenous communities autonomy in navigating and transforming their energy systems, grounded in the community’s culture, visions, and aspirations.

The status quo approach need not continue indefinitely. Given appropriate enabling legislation and direction, the BCUC could be playing a leading role in enabling the transition toward a low-carbon, affordable, and equitable energy system. Other jurisdictions, including the states of Washington and California, have explicitly incorporated climate objectives, equity, and support for low-income customers into the statutes governing their utility regulators.

In our recent [backgrounder](#), we outlined our suggested approach to modernizing the Utilities Commission Act and the prevailing interpretation of this statute by the Commission and utilities. As BC looks toward a clean energy future, the BCUC will play a critical role, either in accelerating or holding back, the energy transition and energy justice we need to protect the public interest and British Columbians’ futures.

Quotes:

“British Columbians and the Provincial Government know that we urgently need to decarbonize our economy, and do it in a way that doesn’t leave the most vulnerable on the hook for unaffordable energy costs. BC’s utilities must play a critical role in this transition, and the BCUC needs to be enabled with the regulatory tools that will give them a strong mandate to do so.” — Dylan Heerema, Senior Analyst and Researcher, Community Energy, Ecotrust Canada



“In developing the West Kootenay 100% Renewable Energy Plan, it became clear that rural BC residents don't have adequately reliable and affordable access to electricity. We need to modernize the BCUC so that rural residents can have the affordable and fairly priced energy they need.” – Montana Burgess, Executive Director, West Kootenay EcoSociety

“We wouldn't expect our Utilities and the BCUC to operate effectively using computers from 1980 so why are we standing by while a statute from back then stifles much-needed change? This isn't the hedonistic age of big hair, bigger dreams, and expectations of infinite growth...2021 is when many of us realized how precarious our lives are: socially, medically, and economically. Our utilities' expensive generation and transmission systems have begun to age out and our province's energy needs have evolved as has our understanding of climate science and what is required of truly just and inclusive societies. The province needs to act and replace the UCA with something more modern because safe, reliable, environmentally sound and affordable energy is an essential service, not a luxury.” – Leigha Worth, Executive Director, BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre

About Ecotrust Canada

Ecotrust Canada works with rural, remote, and Indigenous communities toward building an economy that provides for a healthy and resilient natural environment; sustainable and abundant energy, food, and housing; prosperous and meaningful livelihoods; and vibrant cultures and inclusive societies. We call this approach, **building an economy that provides for life**. Our on-the-ground work and systems approach is entrepreneurial, partnership-based and relentlessly practical. ecotrust.ca

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