

B.C.-Alberta working group report lays out pathway for heavy-oil transport to coast

Environmentalists dismiss report as ‘all talk,’ say budget for safety measures is decreasing

BY GORDON HOEKSTRA, VANCOUVER SUN JANUARY 27, 2014



http://www.gov.bc.ca/mngd/doc/BC-Alberta_Working_Group_Report_Premiers.pdf

An oil tanker is guided by tugboats as it travels under the Lions Gate Bridge at the mouth of Vancouver harbour on May 5, 2012.

Photograph by: JONATHAN HAYWARD, THE CANADIAN PRESS

Stronger oversight of oil spill safety is needed as part of a blueprint to get Alberta's heavy oil to the coast for export to new Asian markets, an interprovincial working group recommended Monday.

A report by the government working group, created by Premier Christy Clark and Alberta Premier Alison Redford last year, laid out 21 recommendations to help create world-leading pipeline and oil tanker safety systems, ease the transportation of goods such as oilsands equipment, as well as increase involvement from First Nations.

The working group was a reaction to Clark's demand that five conditions be met — including the world-leading spill system — before heavy-oil pipelines can be built in British Columbia.

At issue are Enbridge's \$6.5-billion Northern Gateway pipeline and Kinder Morgan's \$5.4-billion Trans Mountain expansion.

The report calls for stronger oversight and monitoring of oil spills from pipeline and tankers, including the creation of a federal-provincial spill committee for the marine, pipeline, rail and trucking sectors. The report recommends the two provinces review a recent federal tanker safety report and do a “gap analysis” of its recommendations.

The spill committee is meant to recommend how to pay for spill preparedness and prevention.

The report recommends a permanent B.C.-Alberta spill working group be created and calls for First Nations to have a role in spill planning, response exercises and possible spill response.

The group says it will also work to identify the best way to harmonize roads, rail, pipelines and permits in Alberta and British Columbia to get the most value for energy exports.

The two premiers had already agreed to a framework on how to co-operate on energy exports last

November — with Redford agreeing to B.C.'s five conditions — but the release of the report Monday provides more details.

B.C. Natural Gas Development Minister Rich Coleman was unavailable for comment Monday.

In an email, Coleman said he looked forward to working with Alberta to ensure economic and job growth that balances B.C.'s public safety and environmental needs.

"We're optimistic it will help set the stage for future success, strengthening our position as a global energy supplier and ultimately creating more jobs and a stronger economy," he said.

The working group said getting more oilfield equipment moved from the ports through B.C.'s mountainous interior to the oilfields is an emerging issue.

Alberta Energy Minister Diana McQueen said it's further evidence the energy sector has multiple ripple effects.

"We've always said there's lots of benefits for both provinces, and certainly for the nation as a whole," McQueen said in an interview.

Just before Christmas, a federal review panel approved Northern Gateway, which now awaits federal government approval. Kinder Morgan is just entering the review process.

The two pipeline projects would create thousands of construction jobs and hundreds of permanent jobs. Most importantly to Alberta and its oil producers, the pipelines would open up new, lucrative markets in Asia.

But the projects have been strongly opposed by B.C. First Nations, environmental groups and some northern and Lower Mainland municipalities, including Vancouver and Burnaby. The opposition focuses on the significant jump in traffic of nearly 600 tankers off the B.C. coast that would increase the potential for a devastating spill. First Nations and environmental groups have already launched court action on the Northern Gateway panel decision.

ForestEthics campaigner Ben West said the B.C.-Alberta report reads like it was written by industry rather than government, and calls into question the B.C. Liberal government's seriousness about its five conditions.

The reality is the Coast Guard is being cut, environmental regulations are being slashed, oversight diminished and safety reduced, West said. "All we see is these reports, we don't see anything in terms of increased spending. To me, it's all talk," he said.

The report also said more information needs to be disseminated, including through social media, to bridge the "disconnect" in public consciousness on the true value to jobs and income that stems from the oil and gas industries.

And it reiterates an agreement struck last year by the two premiers that B.C. is free to negotiate with industry to seek better economic benefits on the pipelines, but without seeking a cut of Alberta's oil royalties.

Monday's report also sets out timelines over the next 18 months for the working group's recommendations.

With Canadian Press files

ghoekstra@vancouversun.com

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun