

Memorandum

Date: October 30, 2019
To: CAUT Council
From: David Robinson, Executive Director
Re: **CAUT and Climate Change**

At the Spring 2019 Council meeting, a motion on climate change was passed. **(See Council Item 10.(i)(J) Doc 1)**. At its June and September meetings, the Executive Committee considered and discussed the recommendations and issues arising from the motion. The Executive is suggesting the following actions be considered by Council:

1. Engage in advocacy and lobbying efforts in support of effective public policy to combat climate change.
2. Leverage the collective bargaining process to negotiate climate friendly initiatives on campuses.
3. Develop internal policies and practices to reduce CAUT's carbon footprint.

1. Enhanced federal advocacy

- The Executive believes that the strongest and most effective way for CAUT to address the climate crisis is to enhance our capacity to undertake federal advocacy on climate change. CAUT has already taken several steps in this regard. CAUT has joined the Climate Action Network, the only network in the country that brings labour, development, faith-based, and Indigenous groups together with the key national, provincial, and territorial environmental organizations working on climate change. Our membership in the Climate Action Network greatly enhances our capacity to understand and respond to federal climate change developments and to take timely action, coordinating with allied organizations for greatest impact.
- Our pre-budget submission focused on the critical role that post-secondary education plays in understanding climate change impacts and finding solutions to assist adaptation and mitigation efforts.
- CAUT supported and encouraged associations to organize around the September 2019 Climate Week of Action.

2. Bargaining to combat climate change

- The Executive Committee believes that CAUT and its member associations can use their power at the bargaining table to promote climate friendly policies and practices. We have already developed a Bargaining Advisory on Climate Change (2017) and a Combatting Climate Change on Campus brochure that will support local associations interested in negotiating for reduced emissions on their campus.

- We are developing a workshop on organizing for climate bargaining. The workshop is an action research project of the SSHRC-funded project, Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces to Climate Change. CAUT has been a co-investigator in the project since 2017.
- The issue of bargaining for climate change could be a theme of a future Forum for Chief Negotiators.

3. Review of CAUT operations

The Executive Committee reviewed CAUT's workplace emissions and sustainability efforts. Some initiatives that have already been taken include the following:

- The CAUT office building received an Eco Energy award for its construction in 2008 as it was built to reduce emissions and save energy.
- CAUT's heating and cooling system is maintained and is being upgraded to newer and more efficient equipment in the coming year.
- Lights and equipment are activated by motion-sensor and are energy efficient.
- Electronic communications and documentation have overwhelmingly replaced paper, with the exception of the Bulletin, which was transitioned to certified eco-friendly paper in 2016.
- A video conference facility was installed in CAUT's boardroom and staff were trained in the use of GoToMeeting software to facilitate virtual meetings in 2017. We are currently planning to upgrade this facility and provide additional staff training.
- CAUT provides a Green Transportation Allowance for all employees to encourage the use of public transport in the commute to work.

Based on our initial audit, travel is the major source of greenhouse gas emissions resulting from CAUT operations. The motion from last Council asked the Executive specifically to consider the frequency and location of Council meetings as one possible way to mitigate travel-related emissions. As Council is centrally located, and as staff are able to participate without air travel, the Executive concluded that changing the location would most likely result in higher emissions being generated.

As CAUT is a member driven organization that is powered by people, the Executive Committee believes that reducing the number of meetings of Council would have a significantly negative impact on the development of policy, consideration of timely motions such as censure, and other essential political and business matters. It is important to note that Council, until the early 1990s, was held three times a year.

However, the Executive did consider ways in which we could reduce CAUT's carbon footprint with respect to meetings without compromising our effectiveness as an organization of people. The Executive is recommending that Council consider the following actions and initiatives:

1. *Revise our travel policy to promote low carbon travel.* For example, Council could consider a revision directing our travel agency to ensure participants book direct flights on fuel efficient aircraft whenever possible. Limiting connecting flights would result in significantly reduced emissions, as most fuel is burned during take-off and landing. Additionally, where possible, we could request participants to travel by train or other fuel-efficient means for those travelling within 500 km¹ of CAUT meetings. Finally, we could ask those attending CAUT events to use public transit for ground transportation.

1. For meetings in Ottawa, member associations located within 500km include: Ottawa, Carleton, St. Paul's, Queen's, Montreal, McGill, Concordia, Concordia (Part-Time), UOIT, Trent, Toronto, CUPE 3902, Toronto (St. Michael's), York, Ryerson, OCAD, OPSEU, McMaster, Wilfrid Laurier, Waterloo, Guelph, Nipissing, Laurentian, Laval, and Bishop's. Western and Windsor are accessible by train, but outside the 500km zone.

2. *Develop a procurement/contracting policy to green CAUT events and purchases.* One option identified by the Executive would be to provide more vegetarian food options and less meat at CAUT events. By some estimates, raising livestock for meat, eggs and milk generates 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, the second highest source of emissions and greater than all transportation combined.
3. *Where possible, combine CAUT and CAUT-related meetings with Council.* We could explore holding other CAUT events such as committee meetings, forums, conferences, and the CAUT Defence Fund meeting in conjunction with Council in order to reduce travel frequency. There are some potential logistical challenges here that would need to be further explored in consultation with members.
4. *Expand CAUT video-conferencing capacity in the office and increase use for meetings and workshops of one day or less.* As we upgrade our video-conferencing facilities, we can limit staff travel where feasible and provide shorter training events and workshops on-line.
5. *Explore the efficacy of purchasing carbon offsets for air travel to move towards carbon neutrality.* Carbon offsetting is the process of compensating for greenhouse gas emissions through schemes that are designed to make corresponding reductions in emissions from other parts of the economy. Carbon offsets are used, for example, to plant trees and invest in renewable energy projects. However, the efficacy of carbon offsets is debatable and many environmentalists and climate change experts warn they may in fact be counterproductive.

Attachments

- See **Council Item 14.(a) Doc 6** of the Council kit
- Article: Solidarity with the week of Climate Action (2019-09-19)
- CAUT Bargaining Advisory on Climate Change (2017-05)
- [Confronting Climate Change on Campus](#)