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George W. Bush

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Search


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HOME

 NEWS

 EU EMISSIONS TRADING

- Carbon Market Europe
- Research & Reports
- Carbon Market Trader
- CM Indicator

 RESEARCH & REPORTS

- Carbon Market Analyst
- Carbon Market Quarterly
- Carbon Market Monitor
- Trading Schemes DB

 CDM & JI

- CDM Monitor
- CDM Monitor 
- CDM Monitor 
- CDM モニター 
- CDM 追踪 

- Research & Reports
- Country Profiles: JI

 CONSULTANCY

- Selected Projects
- Available Reports

 PARTNERSHIPS

- CDM Partners
- Climate Top 50
- CRU Group
- ESP
- J-Power/Fuji
- RISI
- Vertis

News

26.08.04 Questions asked on Martin's commitment to Kyoto

A controversial piece of legislation may be the litmus test of the Canadian leadership's commitment to fight climate change.

The article was published in the [Globe and Mail](#). A new bill developed by a group of specialists in the Department of Natural Resources of Canada proposes market-based approach to tackling greenhouse gas emissions of large final emitters: the big petroleum producers, power generators and manufacturers. Under existing plans, they must reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions by 55 MtCO2 from business-as-usual levels by 2010.

Under the proposed bill, these large emitters would be given permits allowing them to produce 85 per cent of their emission quota for free; after that, they would have to reduce emissions or buy the permits, either from the government or from emitters that came in under target and had permits to sell.

This bill is seen as a first, essential step for Canada to meet its Kyoto obligations. It could be presented to the cabinet as soon as the cabinet makes an appropriate request, according to the [Globe and Mail](#). Environmentalists predict the relevant memorandum will soon be on its way to the cabinet, and legislation will be introduced to the House in the beginning of October.

Industry remains sceptical on the proposal, pointing to the absence of close negotiations with the emitters themselves, and the fact that key federal-provincial agreements are not in place.

There could be also an in-between solution. Provided Martin clearly affirmed that his government was behind the bill and planned to introduce it in due course, the legislation could wait until next year, the [Globe and Mail](#) says. That would give industry the necessary heads-up to begin planning for implementation.

But that affirmation would itself be politically expensive. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein would see it as a fresh humiliation of Alberta, and there will be objections from the western caucus, the Conservatives (though it would have the support of the Bloc and the NDP), as well as from the emitters themselves, according to the [Globe and Mail](#). Martin is also likely to hear inconvenient questions about how Canada planned to meet the rest of its Kyoto commitments.

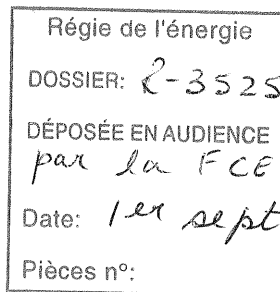
Martin's record on Kyoto has been rather chequered. Before the elections has generally been seen as a Kyoto-skeptic. While supporting the Chretien government's decision to ratify the treaty to fight global warming, he lamented the absence of a specific implementation plan. In his first government, however, the Prime Minister did not do much to advance such a plan, leading to accusations that Kyoto had no priority at the cabinet table.

During the election, Mr. Martin stressed the Liberal commitment to fighting global warming, as opposed to Conservative plans to abandon the treaty. However, as soon as the election was over, he sacked David Anderson, a fervent supporter of the accord, as environment minister, while keeping John Efford, who has expressed reservations about Kyoto, in the Department of Natural Resources. He also staffed the cabinet with conservative-leaning Liberals, such as David Emerson, Anne McLellan and Ralph Goodale.

How Mr. Martin will deal with the new bill on large emitters is likely to show whether the commitment to Kyoto he stressed during the election campaign was genuine or nothing more than election rhetoric.

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[Back](#) |  [Print](#)



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- 24.06.04 All trading strate new EU states
- 28.05.04 The