

Opinion: Ripple effects from permanent tanker moratorium will be nationwide



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Douglas Channel, the proposed termination point for an oil pipeline in the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project, is pictured in a 2012 aerial view of Kitimat, B.C. on the province's northern coast. *DARRYL DYCK / THE CANADIAN PRESS*

The federal government has asked for input on how to formalize an oil tanker moratorium along B.C.'s north coast. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce is opposed to this moratorium, and alarmed that a short and hushed consultation process of six weeks is all the government offered the public on this critical issue.

This process comes at a time when the federal government has publicly staked a claim on its commitment to inclusively consult Canadians on issues of national importance. A [moratorium on tanker traffic \(http://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/justin-trudeau-wont-be-pinned-down-on-b-c-oil-tanker-ban-timing\)](http://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/justin-trudeau-wont-be-pinned-down-on-b-c-oil-tanker-ban-timing) is indeed such an issue.

Transport Canada asked the public to weigh in on two questions. The [first question \(http://www.letstalktransportation.ca/crude-oil-tanker-moratorium\)](http://www.letstalktransportation.ca/crude-oil-tanker-moratorium) asked: "What do you believe are the most important issues the government should address in its plan to formalize a crude oil tanker moratorium?"

The most obvious of the important issues, in our opinion, is the economic loss communities will suffer if Canadian energy products lose critical access to the coast and therefore, world markets.

This will mean that projects like the Northern Gateway pipeline will not be built, with a resulting loss of 3,000 jobs during the project's three construction phases, \$1.5 billion of spending in Alberta communities during construction and 380 long-term operational positions. These jobs and economic activity are needed right now.

The deeper issue is that the rush to [formalize a tanker moratorium \(http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-transport-mandate-letter\)](http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-transport-mandate-letter) is at cross-purposes with the quality of dialogue and decision-making Canadians will surely depend on to flourish in the 21st century. Sidestepping consultation with legitimate stakeholders reinforces the polarization that, in many cases, skews us from prioritizing fact before politics in our public policy.

As a result, the collaboration and national processes Canadians depend on to build our nation and prosper are weakened. Formalizing this moratorium will hurt us as a nation when the evidence and impacts so clearly deserve transparent and balanced consideration.

In coming decades, Canadians will face increasingly difficult issues with intertwined considerations of economy, environment and culture. The complexity

will not go away. We will be better placed to deal with these challenges if we model today the kind of approach that will be needed in the future.

The [second question](http://www.letstalktransportation.ca/crude-oil-tanker-moratorium/forum_topics/what-approach-do-you-believe-could-best-protect-the-environment-while-minimizing-economic-impacts-on-communities) (http://www.letstalktransportation.ca/crude-oil-tanker-moratorium/forum_topics/what-approach-do-you-believe-could-best-protect-the-environment-while-minimizing-economic-impacts-on-communities) posed by Transport Canada wondered, “What approach do you believe could best protect the environment while minimizing economic impacts on communities.”

Our answer is simple. Projects like Northern Gateway will actually help the federal government ensure that the B.C. coast is protected for all operators in the area by improving the current capacity to prevent incidents through land-based radar, navigational aids and approach channels.

Hundreds of vessels of all types carrying hazardous products, including U.S. oil tankers, will still pass close to our vital waterways and traverse our northwest coast every year. Banning oil tankers from departing our shores skirts issues of marine safety that we must be prepared to address if we truly value our coastline ecosystems.

Canadian companies are world leaders in developing technologies and safety regimes that advance the responsible development and transport of natural resources. The revenues Canadians have received from developing our resources have provided the funds, in both the public and private sectors, to invest in the very skills and technologies that position us as influencers in the global dialogue of climate change and environmental stewardship.

We should not step back from this leadership. Continuing to pioneer our expertise provides opportunity for Canadians to promote and model development that balances economic and ecological prosperity.

Canada has an interconnected economy; that means the perspectives of communities across the nation are relevant to this proposal and should be duly taken into consideration.

Canada's coastline defines us all. We are asking that the Government of Canada go back and take the time to properly consult with all Canadians on this matter of national importance before taking a final decision on a moratorium.

Ken Kobly is president and CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.