The International Institute for Sustainable Development Expresses Strong Support for Bill C-69

WHAT IS BILL C-69?

- The proposed Bill C-69 will reinforce and legalize regulatory and assessment processes for energy and infrastructure projects. These processes are intended to protect Canada’s environment and abundant natural beauty, and maintain the country’s natural resources for long-term use.
- The bill is a response to many of the rollbacks that were implemented in 2012 by the federal government that eliminated requirements to consider the health and social effects of major infrastructure projects and exclude the concerns of citizens not “directly affected” by development.
- In 2015, the currently governing Liberal Party pledged to review Canada’s environmental assessment processes and to make them fairer and more effective, with a focus on sustainable development, so they balance economic growth and environmental protection.
- Bill C-69 represents a comprehensive response to the concerns and needs of a wide range of Canadian stakeholders. The bill has undergone an extensive consultation process, with input from industry, academic researchers and the general public.

WHY DOES IISD STRONGLY SUPPORT BILL C-69?

- Clear and comprehensive environmental assessment procedures are a critical means by which Canadians can ensure environmental protection in the face of different scales and types of energy and infrastructure development.
- Bill C-69 demonstrates the federal government’s goal of emphasizing sustainability, climate and gender issues through the assessment processes, and for that we applaud them.
- Also of great significance is the bill’s requirement to consider the impacts on Indigenous communities, which are often directly impacted by such infrastructure projects, and so assessment procedures must prioritize their concerns.
- Bill C-69 notably champions the use of both western science and traditional knowledge in informing decision making, which is critical.
- It also underlines the importance of assessment processes being transparent and subject to accountability measures to ensure that the procedures are effectively implemented.
WHAT IMPROVEMENTS TO BILL C-69 DOES IISD SUGGEST?

- Currently only “major projects” are covered under the proposed impact assessment processes. It is problematic that these “major projects” are not defined, as this could result in ambiguity and loopholes when it comes to implementation. At the very least, the term “major projects” needs to be clearly defined, and that definition should include the scale of the project, as well as level of environmental and social impact.

- Many of the critical decisions related to the assessment will be made in the planning phase, including whether a full assessment will be required, its scope and what information will be gathered and through which processes. We recommend the establishment of a clear and transparent system for this planning phase, including a multi-stakeholder committee composed of government agencies and Indigenous governments, along with industry and environmental groups, to ensure a balanced approach.

- Current language indicates that assessments must consider how projects will help or hinder Canada’s ability to meet international targets on climate or sustainability (such as under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, or the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals). While this is commendable and necessary, the plans to enforce these criteria should be made clearer and articulated in the bill.

- Finally, the Government of Canada should clarify how the processes of ensuring accountability and transparency will work.