ADDRESSING POLARIZATION: WHAT WORKS?

CASE STUDY: THE JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

BRENDAN FRANK AND
SÉBASTIEN GIRARD LINDSAY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Positive Energy's "What Works?" Case Studies

Positive Energy's research and engagement aims to identify how to strengthen public confidence in public authorities (policymakers, regulators, the courts, Indigenous and municipal governments) making decisions about Canada's energy future in an age of climate change. Three research streams, each with a variety of projects, events and reports, ground the effort: Polarization, Roles and Responsibilities, and Models of and Limits to Consensus-Building. The research effort begins with the work on polarization. Positive Energy seeks to understand polarization as a general phenomenon, its extent, nature and consequences when it comes to energy and environment, and how decision-makers can go about addressing it.

This case study is one of four that aim to identify 'What Works?' when it comes to addressing polarized contexts. Each case examines an organization, program, or initiative established to address polarization: the Alberta Climate Leadership Plan, Canada's Ecofiscal Commission, the Just Transition Task Force, and the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy. The cases represent a mix of national and provincial level efforts, initiatives driven by governments versus those initiated by non-government actors, and those that targeted the general public versus decision-maker audiences.

The Case: The Just Transition Task Force

Canada plans to phase out the use of coal-fired electricity by 2030. The phase-out is one climate policy agreed to by federal, provincial and territorial governments under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change, and will affect four provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In 2018, the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change commissioned an 11-person panel called the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities (the Task Force). Its mandate was to engage stakeholders and visit communities affected by the phase-out and to provide policy recommendations to the federal government based on what it heard.

The Process

A just transition means equitably distributing the costs associated with the shift to a low-carbon economy across affected communities and society at large. One vital component of a just transition is procedural justice: ensuring that individuals affected by these changes are able to meaningfully participate in the decision-making process. Providing these opportunities to stakeholders can improve the likelihood of consensus and reduce the risk of polarization.

The Task Force was established in large part to provide these opportunities to communities affected by the coal phase-out. We identified several aspects of the task force model that may reduce the risk of polarized opinion over energy and climate issues in Canada. Most important were the neutral, non-partisan approach and the demonstration of ethical commitment of Task Force members, aided by a dynamic, iterative approach to consultations that took regional realities into consideration. However, several issues—many outside of the Task Force's control—may have increased the risk of polarization. The most notable deficiencies relate to the timing of the phase-out given the downturn in commodity prices, as well as the nature of Canadian federalism, which increases the likelihood that the phase-out will unfold asymmetrically across provinces.

The Aftermath

The risks of polarization over Canada's coal phase-out are strongly linked to the future actions of governments, unions, communities, and businesses alike. The Task Force's mandate lasted nine months, but policy decisions around the coal phase-out will continue for years to come. The Task Force offered a road map, but importantly, was not accountable for the implementation of its recommendations and had no incentive to account for policy or political realities in acting on them. To date, the government has pledged $185 million for coal communities. Although the proposed programmes will help affected communities, this cannot compensate entirely for lost jobs and livelihoods.

The national discussion over a just transition is just beginning. Several elements of the Task Force's approach are worth building on and studying further to reduce the risk of polarized opinion over energy and climate issues in Canada. Specifically, this research suggests that anyone designing or leading similar task force processes should pursue opportunities to go beyond the technocratic dimensions of the policy problem, engage with stakeholders in both formal and informal settings, ensure that the composition of the task force is geographically and vocationally reflective of the groups it is consulting, and, crucially, avoid any perceptions of partisanship or politicization. Lastly, given the complexity of Canada's climate and energy files, it is important to consider the timing of the consultations and situate any policy problem a task force is commissioned to address within the broader policy, political and economic context.
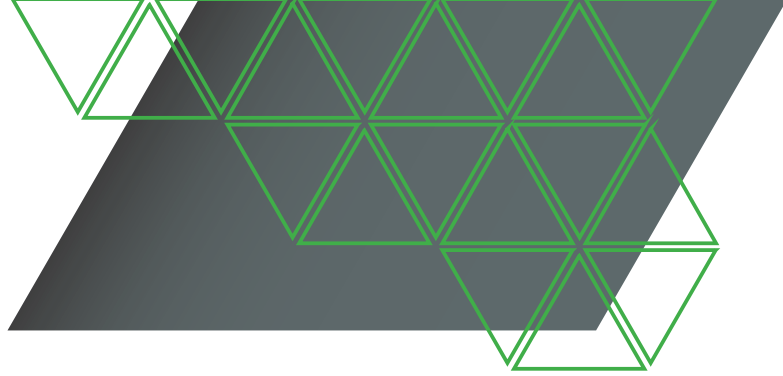
INTRODUCTION

The Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities (the Task Force) was an 11-person panel commissioned by the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change in 2018, with a mandate to engage stakeholders and visit communities affected by the federal government's plan to phase out coal-fired electricity nationwide by 2030. From May to June 2018, the Task Force visited Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, meeting with over 4,000 workers and representatives from industry, labour, finance, government, Indigenous groups and academia. Following these consultations, the Task Force produced two reports and a set of recommendations for the federal government to minimize the impacts of the phase-out on coal communities (Canada 2019a; Canada 2019b).

The coal phase-out was agreed to by federal, provincial and territorial governments under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change (Canada 2019a). Elements of the Framework, including the federal carbon tax and the Low Carbon Economy Fund, have proven divisive, if not polarizing, along partisan and regional lines (Bird et al. 2019; Gibillini 2019). There are several reasons for this. The federal coal phase-out was championed by the then newly elected Liberal government, but three of the four provinces affected by the phase-out—Alberta, Saskatchewan and to a lesser extent New Brunswick—have traditionally voted for conservative-leaning political parties. Moreover, the Liberals announced the phase-out during a time of significant uncertainty for energy-producing provinces, a protracted downturn in commodity prices and delays to major infrastructure projects. Situated within this broader policy, political and economic context, the coal phase-out was one of several policies that risked driving polarization in these communities and provinces as part of a broader backlash against federal climate policies.
This case study aims to identify specific attributes and

processes of the Just Transition Task Force that might help depolarize debates over energy and climate issues in Canada. It is one of four that aim to identify "What Works?" when it comes to addressing polarized contexts. Each case examines an organization, program, or initiative established to address polarization: the Alberta Climate Leadership Plan, Canada's Ecofiscal Commission, the Just Transition Task Force, and the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy. The cases represent a mix of national and provincial level efforts, initiatives driven by governments versus those initiated by non-government actors, and those that targeted the general public versus decision-maker audiences.

Specifically, this study assesses the extent to which the Task Force observed norms of procedural justice. This critical concept refers to the processes used to develop and legitimize remedies to address divisive issues or policies—in this case a coal power phase-out. We then assess additional dimensions of the Task Force's work that may have reduced the risk of polarization over the coal phase-out.

This analysis makes use of both primary and secondary sources: in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of the Task Force (4) and a mayor of a town that participated in Task Force consultations (1), a media analysis of the Task Force's activities, a review of ENGO and labour organizations' responses to Task Force activities, and documentation related to the Task Force (its mandate letter from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and its final reports).[1] The study is not intended to be exhaustive or conclusive, but rather, a qualitative exploration of the process used by the Task Force in its activities. This is not the first case study of the Just Transition Task Force; we discuss a study by the European Commission that explored the conditions that enhanced the Task Force's legitimacy in greater detail below (2019a).

Overall, this study suggests that the Task Force observed several principles associated with procedural justice. This may have reduced the risk of polarization over the federal coal phase-out. However, there were several issues—many outside of the Task Force's control—that undermined its ability to fulfill some principles of procedural justice during its mandate. These deficiencies relate to the timing of the phase-out and the nature of Canadian federalism, the latter of which may complicate the federal government's efforts to implement the Task Force's recommendations.

There are several important limitations to this study. Perceptions of procedural justice matter just as much as the observation of its norms (Blader and Tyler 2003). In this case, that would mean understanding perceptions of community members who engaged in the Task Force's consultations, which was beyond the scope of this study. In addition, perceptions of procedural justice can be shaped retroactively by subsequent decisions (Flint and Hernandez-Marrero 2006), in this case decisions that the federal government makes in response to the Task Force's recommendations. This includes the scope and nature of federal supports provided to coal communities. These issues are also beyond the scope of this research but warrant further study.

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1   We reached out to all Task Force members several times. Some did not respond to our requests. Others were not interested in participating. The findings from the interviews, therefore, have important limitations. However, combined with the media analysis and review of documentation related to the Task Force, the study nonetheless offers insights into the workings of the Task Force.

BOX: POSITIVE ENERGY'S RESEARCH ON POLARIZATION

The second three-year phase of Positive Energy (2019-2021) aims to address the following question:
How can Canada, an energy-intensive federal democracy with a large resource base, build and maintain public confidence in public authorities (federal, provincial, and territorial policymakers and regulators, Indigenous governments, municipal governments and the courts) making decisions about the country's energy future in an age of climate change?

Three fundamental questions form the research and engagement agenda. How can Canada effectively overcome polarization over its energy future? What are the respective roles and responsibilities between policymakers, regulators, the courts, municipalities and Indigenous governments when it comes to decision-making about its energy future? What are the models of and limits to consensus-building on energy decisions?

Understanding the various dimensions of polarization over energy and environmental issues is fundamental to addressing roles and responsibilities, and models of and limits to consensus-building.

And yet, the extent and consequences of polarization over Canada's energy future are unclear. Positive Energy's research and engagement on polarization seek to understand polarization as a general phenomenon affecting policies of all sorts, to assess the nature and extent of polarization when it comes to energy and environment, and to offer strategies to address or navigate polarized contexts.

The polarization research programme includes the following projects:

- A literature review on polarization as a general phenomenon: its causes, severity and consequences
- Original survey research to measure and track polarization among decision-makers and the general public
- Interviews with energy and environmental leaders to understand the role of language and terminology: unpacking assumptions and interpretations of the term "transition"
- Exploring attitudes and the role of values when it comes to perceptions of energy technologies (renewable energy technologies and carbon capture, utilization and storage)
- Identifying "What works?": Case studies of organizations and programs designed to address polarization

A PRIMER ON COAL POWER

Coal-fired power is by far the largest contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Canada's electricity sector and one of the largest sources of GHG emissions globally. In 2015, coal produced 11% of Canada's electricity but 78% of electricity sector GHG emissions. Worldwide, coal-fired power is responsible for 20% of GHG emissions (Canada 2019a).

Canada has positioned itself as an international leader in accelerating the phase-out of coal-fired electricity. In 2012, the federal government capped the emissions intensity of coal-fired generating units, effectively shortening the lifespan of several powerplants nationwide (Canada 2019a). After ratifying the Paris Agreement in 2016, the federal government announced it would accelerate this timetable and close all remaining coal-fired power plants by 2030. In 2017, Canada and the United Kingdom co-founded the Powering Past Coal Alliance to share best practices and help nations reduce their reliance on coal (Fünfgeld 2018). As of September 2020, the Alliance has 111 members, made up of 34 national governments, 33 subnational governments, and 44 companies and organizations (PPCA 2020).

There are currently 15 coal power stations and nine thermal coal mines across Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, though the phase-out only applies to facilities that would have operated beyond 2030 (Canada 2019a). The effects of these transitions will differ across Canadian provinces and regions. The economic and social impacts of the coal phase-out will depend on a community's demographic makeup, industrial base and geography, among other factors.

WHAT IS JUST TRANSITION?

The concept of "just transition" was originally developed by the American labour movement in the 1970s and 1980s after the introduction of new regulations aimed at combatting air and water pollution (Abraham 2017; Healy and Barry 2017). The term became widespread and is increasingly associated with the transition to low- or zero-emissions energy. The Just Transition Task Force's final report describes it as follows:

> "Just transition means that society shares the costs of transitioning to a low-carbon economy. It would be unjust for workers and communities in affected sectors to shoulder the full cost of transition. These workers and communities, like all Canadians, have earned a better future. In practice, just transition requires cooperation and collaboration among workers, unions, employers, communities, families, and all levels of government. Together, they actively identify and implement opportunities to develop skills, secure decent work, sustainably develop their communities, and enhance social protections." (Canada 2019a: 1).

Several international organizations have incorporated the concept of just transition into their policies, including the International Labor Organization (2018) and the European Commission (2019b). Most recently, the European Commission has incorporated just transition into its "Green Pact for Europe", a strategy to make the continent carbon neutral by 2050 (Ibid). In the context of Canada's coal phase-out, just transition principles aim to ensure that communities and the workers who depend on this industry do not assume disproportionate environmental and economic burdens associated with this and other climate policies (Harrahill and Douglas 2019; Cha 2018; Newell and Mulvaney 2013).
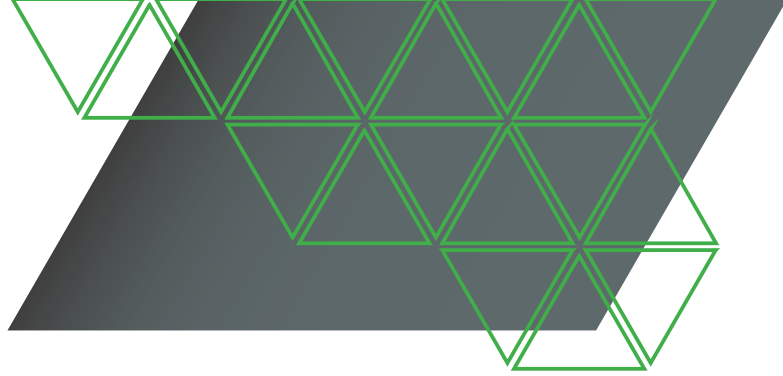
JUST TRANSITION, PROCEDURAL JUSTICE AND POLARIZATION

A common thread running through the just transition literature is the application of procedural and distributive justice to reduce asymmetries of power in decision-making (Heffron and McCauley 2017; International Labour Organization 2015). Procedural justice refers to equity in the process used to make decisions, while distributive justice refers to equity in the substance of decisions. The literature has established that stronger procedural and distributive justice can reduce the risk of polarization and backlash over contentious decisions (Flint and Hernandez-Marrero 2006; Flint 2001).

As it relates to the Task Force, procedural justice includes the group's formal consultations, as well as its informal interactions with community members outside of the mandated consultations. Distributive justice refers to the supports put in place by the federal government following the Task Force's recommendations. Since the Task Force is not the ultimate decision-maker when it comes to distributive justice and its influence was limited to making recommendations to the federal government, this study focuses primarily on the consultation process (i.e., procedural justice).

When assessing justice, process can influence perceptions of outcomes. Individuals tend to be more accepting of decision outcomes if they perceive they had agency in the decision-making process, even if a third party is making the decisions. In other words, justice must not only be done but be seen to be done, in both reality and perception (Cleland et al. 2016). Procedural justice matters are operationalized through information, engagement and participation in decision-making (Jackson and Tyler 2018; Nagin and Telep 2017; Sabbagh and Schmitt 2016; Blader and Tyler 2005; Thibaut and Walker 1975; Thibaut et al. 1973).

The defining characteristic of procedural justice is that it provides everyone with the opportunity to participate in a decision-making process and to contribute to outcomes they view as just (Blader and Tyler 2009; Forsé and Parodi 2006). This includes community empowerment, participation in policy development and addressing concerns through dialogue (Cotton 2018; McCauley and Heffron 2018). Procedural justice also has an iterative character, adapting according to the context.

According to Leventhal (1980), six rules must be observed to achieve procedural justice both in perception and reality:

1. Consistency
Procedures must be consistent across *persons* and over *time*. Decisions must be applied in a consistent manner according to predetermined criteria, giving special advantage to none.

2. Neutrality
Personal interests, biases or narrow preconceptions of decision-makers must not play a visible role in decision-making. An individual is likelier to believe that procedural fairness is violated when there is evident self-interest or devotion to doctrinaire views.

3. Accuracy
It is necessary to base the process on as much good, timely information and informed opinion as possible. This includes recordkeeping to ensure accuracy, which can further enhance trust between parties.

4. Correctability
Opportunities must exist for modification or appeal of decisions. Stakeholders will attribute greater fairness to groups and organizations that provide legitimate avenues for challenging and overturning decisions.

5. Representativeness
All stages of the process must be inclusive, participatory and reflect the basic concerns, values and outlook of important subgroups in the population of affected individuals.

6. Ethical Commitment
Decision-makers must uphold standards throughout the process that are compatible with the moral and ethical values of stakeholders. Violation of these standards can influence perceptions of fairness.

Using these six principles, we examine the Task Force's activities and the extent to which Task Force members attended to procedural justice. We also explore perceptions of procedural justice among stakeholders and observers.

THE JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE: ORIGINS, PROCESS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Commissioned in 2018 by Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Just Transition Task Force's purpose was to "provid[e] knowledge, options and recommendations to the Minister" on implementing a just transition for the accelerated phase-out of coal power (ECCC 2018). The Task Force had a four-part mandate:

1. Engage with stakeholders, provinces and municipal governments to receive suggestions on the scale and types of impacts the coal phase-out would cause, identify opportunities to leverage existing resources and to transition workers, and identify policy gaps
2. Report what it heard from stakeholders to the Minister
3. Provide recommendations to the Minister on what a 'just transition plan' could include
4. Provide options and recommendations to the Minister on how to structure another round of consultations around reskilling, training, and planning (ECCC 2018)

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change appointed 11 members to the Task Force for a nine-month period. The Task Force visited 15 communities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, holding eight public engagement sessions, touring five generating stations, two mines and one port and meeting "as many employers of coal workers and businesses that rely on the coal industry as possible" (Canada 2019a).

The Task Force had two co-chairs, the President of the Canadian Labour Congress and the Executive Director of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick. The other members included a workforce development expert, a sustainable development expert, a past executive from a major Canadian electricity utility, a municipal representative, another representative of the Canadian Labour Congress, a representative from a provincial federation of labour and three union members representing a coal-fired generating station, a skilled trade related to coal power and the coal extraction industry (ECCC 2018). Members were unpaid, but eligible for an honorarium if they were not receiving compensation for performing activities related to the Task Force (Canada 2019a).

Based on these consultations and tours, the Task Force ultimately made 10 recommendations to the federal government (Canada 2019a). They fall under three broad categories:

1. Embedding just transition principles in planning, legislative, regulatory and advisory processes to ensure ongoing and concrete actions throughout the coal phase-out
2. Ensuring locally available supports and investments in community infrastructure, planning, collaboration, diversification and stabilization.
3. Providing workers with either a pathway to retirement or transition to sustainable employment.

ASSESSING THE TASK FORCE'S APPLICATION OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

We investigated the extent to which the Task Force's activities reflected principles of procedural justice, and if so, to what extent. We also explored whether these principles merit deeper consideration for depolarizing Canadian views on energy and climate issues. Governments' policy decisions will affect the distribution of costs and benefits of transition (i.e., distributive justice). How rigorously the Task Force adhered to principles of procedural justice during consultations will influence perceptions of those decisions. If members of communities do not believe the consultations were just and impartial, they may be less likely to accept the policy outcomes that emerge from them. As noted earlier, this assessment of the Task Force's activities is exploratory in nature. We do not assert that our conclusions are applicable to other cases.
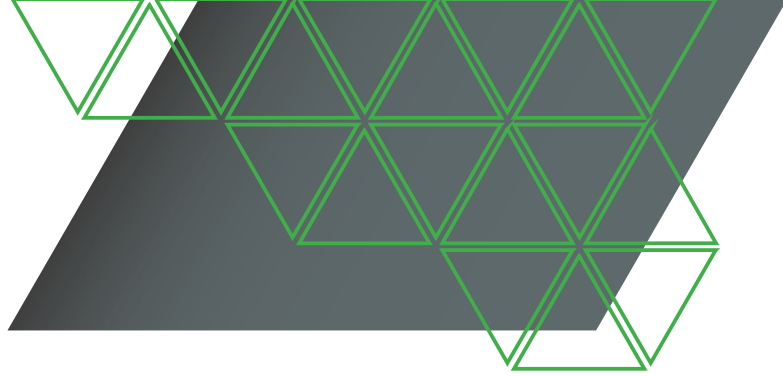
Applying Principles of Procedural Justice

Coal-fired power is the first electricity source to be phased out as a result of national climate policy. Without clear guidance, it could easily become an uncertain process for all involved—especially labour, regulators, municipalities and businesses. Procedural justice can play a crucial role in reducing uncertainty.

Applying Leventhal's six principles of procedural justice—consistency, neutrality, accuracy, correctability, representativeness and ethical commitment—and drawing on documentary and media analysis, we assess the extent to which the consultation activities of the Task Force and the views of its members were informed by procedural justice. We divide the third criterion, accuracy, into *precision* and *timeliness* to reflect the chronology of the Task Force's work within Canada's broader federal climate policy agenda. The analysis focuses mainly on Task Force consultations, but also assesses the group's mandate and recommendations, and, where appropriate, the federal government's response to its recommendations.

Consistency

The first principle is *consistency* of procedures, both across *persons* and over *time*. Our interviews and document analysis suggest that Task Force members believed this criterion was somewhat difficult to meet due to several factors (see below). However, all stakeholders had opportunities to engage with the Task Force, and the Task Force did not privilege the interests of one group of stakeholders or communities over others in its final report. These are both vital components of *consistency*.

The Task Force did not conduct all of its consultations in exactly the same way. One member of the Task Force told us that after each consultation session, the group met to debrief, reflect on the comments received and adjust the approach to future meetings based on new information gathered. While this may undermine the *consistency* criterion, it can bolster other criteria and overall perceptions of procedural justice, as we discuss below.

Beyond *consistency* in consultations, it is crucial to note that there is a broader set of consistency challenges for the coal phase-out moving forward, including the political and policy uncertainty inherent in the phase-out and the nature of Canadian federalism. Given the complexity of energy systems, overlapping or unclear authorities pose a unique challenge to energy transitions (Goldthau and Sovacool 2012). The Task Force aimed to remedy this policy uncertainty by recommending that the federal government embed just transition principles into its decision-making. Specifically, the Task Force recommended that Ottawa:

> "Develop, communicate, implement, monitor, evaluate, and publicly report on a just transition plan for the coal phase-out, championed by a lead minister to oversee and report on progress… [and] Include provisions for just transition in federal environmental and labour legislation and regulations, as well as relevant intergovernmental agreements." (Canada 2019a: 18).

Looking forward, implementing Task Force recommendations consistently across provinces is complicated by the fact that natural resource and electricity regulation is largely within provincial jurisdiction, and no two provinces govern their power sectors in precisely the same way. In fact, *consistency* in this regard may not even be desirable. The Task Force noted in its final report that the phase-out will unfold differently across Canada (Canada 2019a). The federal government's ability to phase out coal arises from its shared jurisdiction over the environment with the provinces, specifically through the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (Becklumb 2013). However, provinces are free to pursue their own phase-outs or negotiate conditions, and several have done so. Alberta initiated its own coal phase-out in 2015, while Saskatchewan and New Brunswick have negotiated equivalency agreements that will allow certain coal plants to operate beyond 2030 in exchange for deeper emissions cuts elsewhere in their economies (Canada 2019c; Canada 2019d). In its final report, the Task Force notes that these confounding factors necessitate stronger, ongoing coordination between all levels of government, public utilities, crown corporations, regulators, unions and community leaders (Canada 2019a).

Neutrality

Interviewees underscored the importance and value of *neutrality*. This includes preventing personal interests or biases from playing any perceptible role in decision-making, the importance of which is stressed in the literature on procedural justice (Lind et al. 1997). While the Task Force's evolving approach may have prevented a rigid *consistent* approach to consultations in each community (see above), it may have in turn enhanced perceptions of *neutrality*. Most importantly, Task Force members continuously emphasized the advisory and nonpartisan nature of their role, which effectively "brought down the temperature in the room" during public consultations.

We found the Task Force's neutrality to be a focus of local media coverage during its consultations. For example, an article in the Estevan Mercury, the local paper of Estevan, Saskatchewan, noted that while the Task Force did not have all the answers for community members in attendance, it was impartial and willing to listen to concerns from community members (Estevan Mercury 2018).
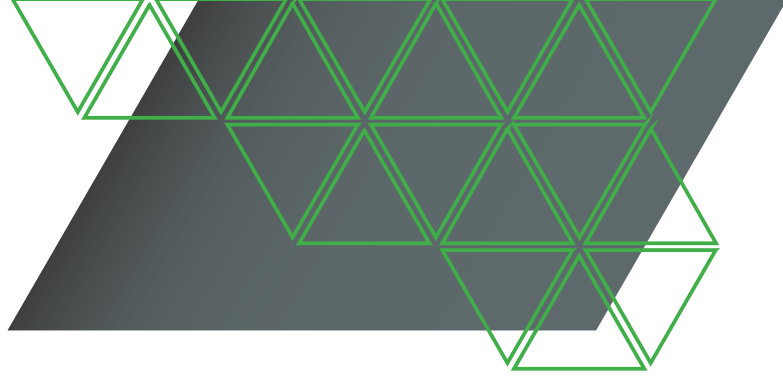
Interviewees stressed the advisory nature of their roles and the nonpartisan mandate of the Task Force. As one member put it:

> *"I don't want to talk politically but everybody goes: 'Oh, you guys work for the Liberal government.' No, we were commissioned by the government to listen to you and then report that. We are not bound by anything other than the mandate of the Task Force."*

This is a crucial point. Positive Energy's ongoing public opinion survey research suggests that polarized opinions over energy and climate issues emerge most frequently along partisan lines (Bird et al. 2019). While the Task Force's mandate does not explicitly mention polarization, our analysis suggests that Task Force members went out of their way to avoid perceptions of partisanship or ideological motivation. All Task Force members interviewed (4) stressed that the Task Force carried out its mandate in a nonpartisan manner.

Accuracy

The third principle of procedural justice is information *accuracy*. As it relates to the Task Force, this criterion captures both the *accuracy* of the Task Force's report to the federal government as well as the *accuracy* of the information that the Task Force presented to communities. In the former case, our document review suggests that the report accurately encapsulates the breadth of stakeholder concerns the Task Force collected during its consultations. In fact, in addition to its final report to the Minister, the Task Force published a second, separate report titled *What we heard from Canadian coal power workers and communities*, with detailed records and appendices documenting what occurred during the consultations (Canada 2019e).

In the case of the information presented to communities, three (3) Task Force members interviewed considered opening a two-way dialogue and public education to be important parts of their mandate. This included communicating the policy objectives behind the phase-out and reassuring affected communities that their concerns would be heard. Our analysis substantiates the claim, and suggests that the Task Force presented clear, accurate information to stakeholders about the purpose of both the coal phase-out and the consultations.

When communicating to the public, it is not necessarily sufficient for information to be accurate: community members must also trust that the information is accurate. One interviewee noted that some community members were less skeptical of the Task Force's legitimacy and motives after Task Force members explained the objectives behind a just transition. It was also important for Task Force members to admit when they did not have all the answers. One interviewee said that many community members preferred openness about what the coal phase-out would mean for them, even if decisions were pending or their questions were unanswerable at the time.
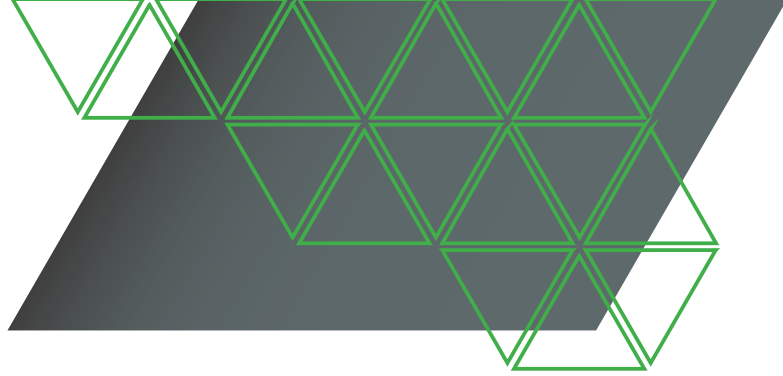
The criteria of *accuracy* and *consistency* both aim to reduce uncertainty, which can be psychologically taxing on communities (Canada 2019b; Vermunt and Steensma 2016). While necessary, these criteria may be insufficient on their own. Here, we expand Leventhal's *accuracy* criterion to include *timeliness*. If stakeholders do not receive information in a timely manner, it can undermine procedural justice, even if the information is *accurate*. As it related to the Task Force, two interviewees pointed out that workers were unhappy about energy sector layoffs that had occurred prior to the federal coal phase-out. We also note the two-year lag between the announcement of the phase-out and the consultations.

Of course, the Task Force was not responsible for this lack of information *timeliness*. The fact that its consultations occurred nearly two years after the unveiling of the Pan-Canadian Framework was out of its control but should not be overlooked when evaluating perceptions of procedural justice. In its final report, the Task Force mentions the lack of timely information regarding the details of the phase-out as a source of unease for workers, which prevented them from making informed decisions about their futures (Canada 2019a; 2019b). While the Task Force communicated accurate information to both stakeholders and to the federal government, a lack of timeliness could undermine public confidence in the process.

Correctability

The *correctability* criterion is difficult to evaluate, given that the Task Force was a temporary body not empowered to implement or adjust its recommendations after delivering them to the Minister or to follow up with citizens and communities on its recommendations. Furthermore, implementation of the Task Force's recommendations remains in its early stages. We note that the Task Force did recommend the federal government legislate its recommendations and make them "robust and difficult to reverse" (Canada 2019). As such, the *correctability* criterion largely falls to the federal government should adjustments to just transition-related legislation prove necessary.

It is worth noting that the criterion of *correctability* has not always been a feature of past economic transitions in Canada. For example, the Task Force cited lessons learned from the 1996 Pacific Salmon Revitalization Strategy to address overfishing in British Columbia by reducing the number of fishing boats and licenses, among other measures. The provincial government did not initially provide any transitional measures for the 2,200 workers affected by these policy changes (Canada 2019a). Unions and local and Indigenous communities eventually negotiated a set of measures to support the communities and workers affected by this transition (Ibid). On the other side of the country, the shuttering of the Devco coal mine on Cape Breton Island is widely viewed as a failed transition that generated a number of unintended consequences. Following the closure of the mine, minimum wage jobs replaced well-paying jobs, resulting in an increase in local poverty levels and the abandonment of 800 homes (Canada 2019b). In this regard, the mere existence of a Task Force with a clear mandate is a marked improvement over previously attempted economic transitions in Canada.

Representativeness

We evaluate *representativeness* by assessing how inclusive and participatory the process was, and whether it reflected the basic concerns of communities affected by the phase-out. There are a number of dimensions to consider with this criterion, including Task Force member selection, the range of stakeholders consulted and the number of opportunities for participation.

Several factors influenced member selection for the Task Force, including diversity (e.g., Indigenous, gender), background (e.g., environmental, academic, skilled trades) and area of expertise (ECCC 2018). The Task Force had strong union representation (six of 11 members had union ties), underscoring the federal government's desire to ensure representation of the interests of affected workers. In this respect, the composition of the Task Force reflected the composition of the communities it consulted. Two interviewees pointed to *representativeness* as crucial to building trust, as it strengthened community perceptions of *accuracy* and *neutrality*. The literature also recognizes the role unions play in just transition by enabling workers to assert their interests and supporting them in reskilling and retraining (Cazabon-Sansfaçon et al. 2019; Evans and Phelan 2016; Rosemberg 2010).

This aspect of *representativeness* also afforded the Task Force a breadth of expertise that proved beneficial during consultations. Members were able to respond to technical questions and concerns from community members. As one interviewee described it:

> *"When you look at policy decisions or you look at research, you're looking for subject matter experts. And what better subject matter expert than one of our members that [sic] are working in the industry?"*

One deficiency in the *representativeness* criteria was *geographical representativeness*. Relatively few Task Force members hailed from provinces affected by the phase-out. This did not go unnoticed in Western provinces. Opinion pieces published during the consultation process noted the Ontario-centric composition of the Task Force, despite the fact the phase-out does not apply to Ontario (Estevan Mercury 2018; Sorensen 2018). In the Hanna Herald op-ed, Member of Parliament Kevin Sorenson noted that only two of the Task Force's 11 members were from Alberta, which he believed could undermine perceptions of the Task Force's legitimacy in coal communities (Sorensen 2018).

The criterion of *representativeness* was also met through the diversity of stakeholders the Task Force consulted and the number of opportunities for participation. As noted, the Task Force met with representatives from industry, labour, finance, government, Indigenous groups and academia, across each region affected by the coal phase-out, including dozens of cities, towns, villages and counties. Consultation sessions were open to the public, and the Task Force put in place opportunities for online submissions for stakeholders who could not attend consultations in person (Canada 2019e).
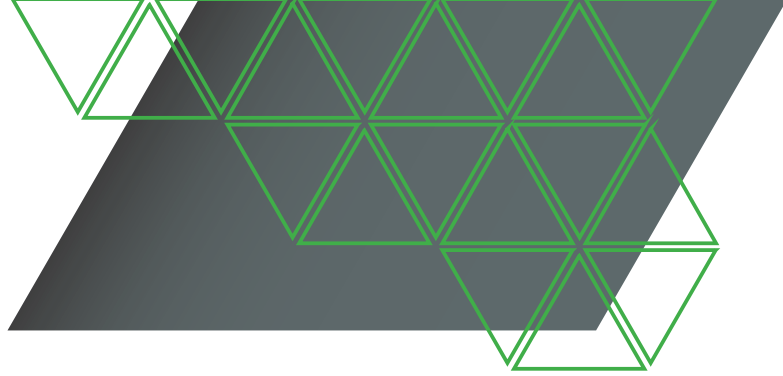
Ethical Commitment

We found strong *ethical commitment* throughout the Task Force's mandate. All interviewees noted that there was an environment of respect and openness during the consultations, which they believed enhanced trust and increased the likelihood that community members would perceive the Task Force as representing their interests. It bears repeating that interviewees viewed the nonpartisan nature of the Task Force as vital in establishing trust and open lines of communication. One interviewee argued that the exercise was productive and even cathartic, allowing citizens to express themselves honestly and sometimes harshly.

The Task Force's iterative approach to consultations may have been beneficial in navigating the various types of resistance to the coal phase-out in different parts of the country. One interviewee told us that exchanges were occasionally hostile, particularly in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Beyond the long-running resistance to federal energy policy in Prairie provinces, working in the coal industry has been a source of tradition, identity and livelihood for generations in many communities. Interviewees and the Task Force's final report noted that workers were proud of their contributions to the Canadian economy, having produced reliable and affordable electricity for their neighbours and communities for decades (Canada 2019a).

The Task Force's reports capture these cultural specificities, calling on the federal government to provide community-level supports, including funding for locally operated transition centres and investments in "community infrastructure" to alleviate job losses (Canada, 2019a; Canada, 2019b). The iterative, dynamic approach taken by the Task Force likely allowed it to better deal with these cultural specificities and to enhance perceptions of *ethical commitment*—and therefore procedural justice.

We also find evidence of *ethical commitment* in the informal procedures around the Task Force's work and consultations. Interviewees noted two main motivations of Task Force members: recognition of the human dimensions of climate policy and the unique needs of each community. Reducing GHG emissions is often presented as a technical problem, but the successful deployment of these technologies is far more challenging without social and political legitimacy (Goodman et al. 2018). According to one member of the Task Force:

> *"I think the debate [over energy and climate change] has been far too abstract. I think that this work was initially intended to address the human side that climate change efforts need to take into consideration. And how we could build a bridge to lessen the tensions and the kind of polarizing debate that's happening in too many places around the world. I think that's been missed [in the debate]. And I think any public policy effort in this regard needs to recognize that you need to take the care that is necessary to ensure we can bring workers and communities together."*

Task Force members noted that they bonded with people in the communities they visited, engaging beyond the technocratic dimensions of their mandate. These informal, interpersonal considerations matter when assessing perceptions of procedural justice (Tyler and Bies 1990). Every interviewee mentioned the importance of informal events where dialogue continued after formal proceedings had concluded. Two Task Force members fondly recalled a town that prepared a meal for them in their community centre. These informal settings allowed members of the Task Force to broaden their understanding of the communities they visited.

Task Force members expressed empathy towards workers who took on skilled, well-paying work in a respected industry within their community. Through no fault of their own, these workers and their families face a highly uncertain future (Canada 2019a; 2019b). The Task Force's final report strongly emphasized the need to acknowledge these workers' skills and consider diverse solutions, including the recommendation that federal departments and bodies meet directly with affected communities to understand their priorities, and establish a link with the federal programs that will support these priorities (Canada 2019a).

Other Considerations

While it does not fit cleanly into Leventhal's six principles, commentary from external parties can also influence perceptions of procedural justice. Overall, commentary was favourable to the Task Force's structure, procedure and recommendations. Environmental non-government organizations (ENGOs) were the most vocal external parties. The Climate Action Network praised the Task Force model as "innovative" and encouraged further investment in the approach by the federal government (Abreu 2018). Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives called the Task Force's final report a "milestone" and praised the labour-centric approach, but it expressed concern over the narrowness of the Task Force's mandate, which focused on a small subset of communities and workers affected by the broader transition to a low-emissions economy (Mertins-Kirkwood 2019). The Canadian Labour Congress (which had two members on the Task Force, including the co-chair) also praised the recommendations in the Task Force's final report (Canadian Labour Congress 2019).

Other ENGOs and labour organizations commented favourably on the federal government's implementation of a small number of the Task Force's recommendations. For example, the Pembina Institute and the International Institute for Sustainable Development both expressed support for inclusion of components of the Task Force's recommendations in the 2019 federal budget, discussed below (Turcotte 2019; IISD 2019).

The processes behind the Task Force's consultations also received some international attention. The European Commission published a case study in 2019, noting implicitly how the structure facilitated procedural justice:
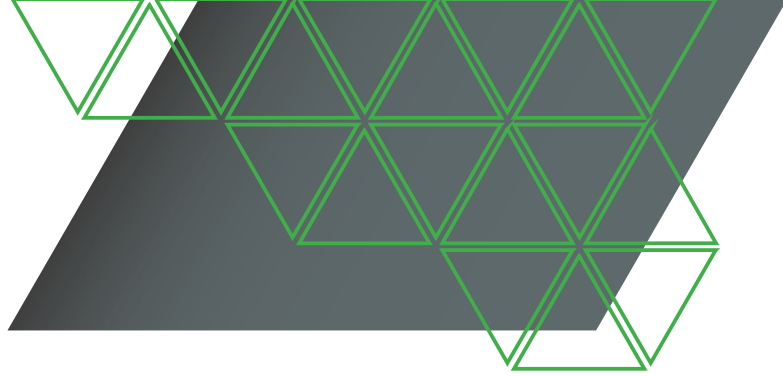
> *"One of the major achievements of the task force was to take affected workers and their families, employers, labour union representatives, municipalities, community members, business representatives, and economic development and non-governmental organisations seriously by engaging directly with them." (European Commission 2019a: 4)*

The European Commission's case study focused on the Task Force's recommendations and the challenges the federal government will face implementing them in provinces that may not share the same vision. The report also described the conditions that enabled the Task Force's creation, specifically the Liberal Party's environmental commitments during the 2015 election campaign, the model offered by the coal phase-out in Ontario, political will and a clear target date. The report also praised the Task Force's clear mandate and robust recommendations—some of which are already being implemented—and asserted that both factors added to its legitimacy (European Commission 2019b).

Linking Procedural and Distributive Justice to Polarization

The relationship between distributive justice, procedural justice and polarization is multidirectional. When individuals are dissatisfied with the outcome of a decision-making process, they will be more likely to accept the outcome if they perceive the process used to arrive at the decision was fair (i.e., if they perceive high levels of procedural justice). However, the opposite can also be true. Participants may be satisfied with the outcomes of a formalized process (i.e., they perceive high levels of distributive justice) even if the process itself did not adhere to principles of procedural justice. In situations with both weak distributive and procedural justice, the risk of polarization is the highest (Flint 2001).

In the context of the coal phase-out, the principle of distributive justice means ensuring that the families and communities reliant upon sectors that face a phase-out do not assume a disproportionate share of the costs associated with the transition (Canada 2019a). If communities perceived an inadequate level of procedural justice on the part of the Task Force, high levels of distributive justice could help overcome this deficiency. The Task Force's report guards against this risk by recommending strong redistributive policies. We note that the Task Force had no incentive to moderate its recommendations (e.g., consider policy costs or implementation challenges) given its lack of accountability for them. If policy costs or implementation challenges prove prohibitive for the federal government, this could undermine perceptions of procedural or distributive justice. As such, the federal government's execution of the Task Force's recommendations (or lack thereof) could further legitimize or delegitimize the entire process.

We evaluate recent federal actions against this backdrop. The government has begun to implement some of the Task Force's recommendations. Budget 2019 included $35 million over five years for new worker transition centres and a dedicated $150 million infrastructure fund to "support priority projects and economic diversification in impacted communities" (Government of Canada 2019). The Liberal Party also promised to table a "Just Transition Act" in its 2019 election platform, though details have yet to materialize (Liberal Party of Canada 2019).

This type of social programming can enhance distributive justice, but interviewees noted that it cannot compensate for lost jobs and livelihoods. Two interviewees expressed real concern for municipalities that will see a steady and possibly irreversible erosion of their tax base, particularly those with less diverse economies. Further efforts to diversify must account for the fact that the replacement of coal jobs with other power production jobs may not be one-for-one. This is true for natural gas-fired power and especially wind and solar. One interviewee told us that the genuine lack of alternatives may lead to the disappearance of certain communities. Another offered an illustration:

> *"When you go to build a solar farm or a wind farm, when the construction work is done and we hand it over to the client, we lock the key at the gate and that's it. There's no parking lot. There's no jobs for people after the fact to go and maintain. It might be the individual covering a large service area that would service those solar farms, wind farms. But by and large, it's controlled remotely. Not pitting one against the other. Just showing the differences in terms of long-term jobs and careers."*

Two other interviewees considered it important that the government provide these supports even if the transition is the result of market forces rather than government policy. We note that this mirrors worker concerns about layoffs that had emerged prior to the announcement of the coal phase-out.
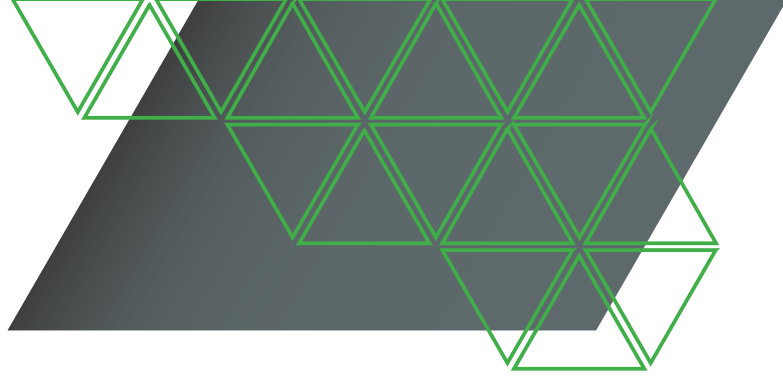
CONCLUSION: WHAT WORKED? WHAT DIDN'T?

A just transition means equitably distributing the costs associated with the shift to a low-carbon economy across affected communities and society at large. This analysis focuses on procedural justice, and also touches on distributive justice—two key dimensions of a just transition. Procedural justice ensures that individuals and communities meaningfully participate in decisions that affect them. Distributive justice ensures that individuals and communities facing an uncertain future as a result of climate policies do not bear a disproportionate share of the costs associated with that transition.

The primary aim of this case study was to identify specific attributes and processes of the Just Transition Task Force potentially conducive to depolarization over energy and climate issues in Canada, specifically with respect to the phase-out of coal-fired power. To do so, we assessed whether the Task Force's consultation process aligned with principles of procedural justice—consistency, neutrality, accuracy of information, correctability, representativeness and ethical commitment. While the study's exploratory nature prevents us from conclusively stating that the work of the Task Force was depolarizing, our findings suggest that it did facilitate respectful dialogue that conformed to several of the principles of procedural justice. Adherence to these principles improves the likelihood of consensus and depolarization (Flint and Hernandez-Marrero 2006; Flint 2001). The Task Force's approach merits additional study, and future applications of the task force model may reduce the risk of polarized opinion over energy and climate issues in Canada.

During formal consultations, our analysis suggests the Task Force upheld the criteria of *neutrality* and *ethical commitment*, as exhibited by its commitment to remain nonpartisan and establish a two-way dialogue with communities. Our evaluation of less technocratic dimensions of the Task Force's work in particular suggests strong *ethical commitment* and concern for procedural justice on the part of Task Force members. This includes its emphasis on the human dimensions of climate policy beyond technocratic considerations and the recommendation for community-specific approaches. The interest of Task Force members in fostering informal social bonds and respecting different regional and cultural realities likely reduced the risk of polarization as well.

Results for the criteria of *consistency, correctability, representativeness* and *accuracy* are more mixed. By design, the Task Force's consultations were not strictly consistent. Instead, the Task Force took an iterative and dynamic approach to its consultations, making adjustments as needed to enhance perceptions of *neutrality* and *ethical commitment*. The effects of this choice on perceptions of procedural justice merit further examination. With respect to policy, the realities of Canadian federalism remain a challenge for *consistency*. The correctability criterion did not apply in this case since the Task Force's mandate did not involve the implementation of its recommendations, but *correctability* is an important policy consideration moving forward. The Task Force's composition was *representative* of the communities it visited, but could have been enhanced with stronger consideration of *geographic representation* of its membership. However, the groups that the Task Force engaged with appear to be broadly representative of stakeholder groups affected by the phase-out.

With respect to *accuracy of information*, we propose expanding Leventhal's criterion to include *timeliness of information*. The uncertainty around the coal phase-out was a significant source of anxiety for many communities, and the fact that the Task Force presented accurate information to these communities was likely of little consolation. In addition, the lack of timeliness brought about by the federal government's commissioning of the Task Force may have undermined perceptions of procedural justice in coal communities. Policymakers looking to implement the Task Force's recommendations may wish to give greater consideration to this criterion.

The national discussion over procedural justice and Canada's coal phase-out is far from finished. It is intimately linked to future actions that governments, unions, communities, and businesses alike take in response to the recommendations of the Task Force. It is also linked to future policy choices. This holds particularly true for the federal government. Additional research could place greater focus on community perceptions of the Task Force's activities, as well as the policies that develop in response to its recommendations. These areas of study will prove valuable in evaluating the justness of outcomes related to Canada's coal phase-out, including their effects on polarization.

APPENDIX: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

General

    1. Today, would you characterize the energy/climate policy discourse in Canada as polarized?

        a. If yes, do you see polarization among the general public and/or decision-makers?

        b. Along what fault lines do you see polarization occurring – partisan, regional, . . .?

The Task Force

    1. Can you describe the origin story of the Task Force? When was it established, by whom and why?

    2. What is the meaning of "Just Transition"?

    3. What were the objectives of the Task Force with regards to addressing polarization over Canada's energy future?

    4. What were the key measures or approaches or strategies that the Task Force applied to depolarize the debate, i.e., to take politics and partisanship out of the discussion?

    5. What is the role of unions in reducing GHG emissions in the economy?

    6. Did you adopt a different communication approach depending on the actor/community you were speaking to?

    7. In which ways did the needs of communities consulted differ from one other?

    8. Did you consult with Indigenous communities? If yes, what were their specific concerns regarding just transition?
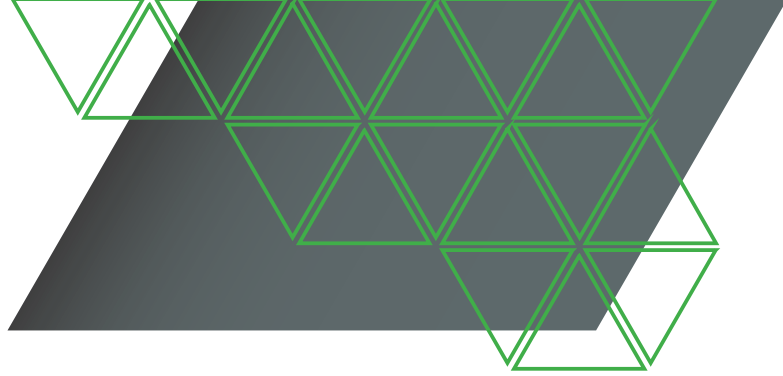
Effectiveness

    1. Do you think the process of consultation was productive in helping people with different views on transition build common ground?

    2. Do you think Indigenous People received sufficient attention in the process of consultation?

        a. If not, why?

        b. If yes, do you think it was worthwhile to receive their input?

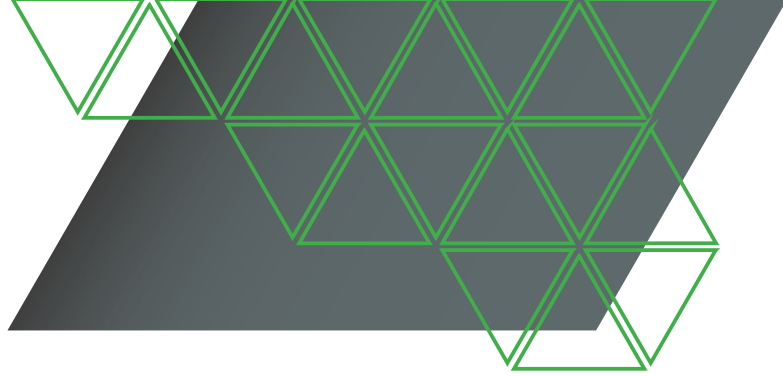   3. How do you think the government will apply the Task Force's recommendations?

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NOTES

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