

This guide will help you facilitate a lively discussion about the tar sands documentary, *Dark Side of the Boom: Canada's Mordor*. Facilitators can use the information provided here to help answer associated questions that may arise and keep the discussion moving forward. Present these questions to the group. Writing the questions on a board or having copies available to hand out might also be helpful.

### Questions:

1. Do you agree that the development of the tar sands is a national issue? Are there any impacts of the tar sands in your community and province?
2. The tar sands have been referred to as an economic engine in Canada. Do you agree? What are the implications of this for Canadians?
3. What do you think can or should be done about the social, environmental and health impacts of the tar sands?
4. How do you think you or your community can become involved in this issue?

### Discussion points:

#### 1. Do you agree that the development of the tar sands is a national issue? Are there any impacts of the tar sands in your community and province?

- The tar sands are approximately three times more greenhouse gas (GHG)-intensive than conventional Canadian oil production and are the fastest growing source of GHGs in Canada. The tar sands are a key reason why Canada has failed to commit to meaningful hard caps on emissions and show how we aren't doing our fair share to address the climate crisis.
- Pipelines are being planned to bring tar sands crude from Alberta to ports in B.C. (to ship to international markets through ecologically significant waterways) and to bring clean burning natural gas from Alaska and the Northwest Territories to fuel the tar sands. The tar sands consume huge amounts of natural gas, a limited fossil fuel resource that heats more than half of Canadian households. Canada continues to produce natural gas faster than reserves are replenished. According to the U.S International Energy Agency, Canada's production/reserves ratio (the number of years of proven reserves remaining at existing production levels) has declined from 35 years in 1985 to nine years in 2006.
- There are refineries in Alberta and Ontario that process tar sands crude and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. These refineries pose serious risks to water depletion and contamination.
- The tar sands contribute to acid rain in Alberta and Saskatchewan. There are proposals for nuclear power in both Alberta and Saskatchewan which, in part, are meant to help power the tar sands.
- Workers migrate from Atlantic Canada to the tar sands.

#### 2. The tar sands have been referred to as an economic engine in Canada. Do you agree? What are the implications of this for Canadians?

- There are long-term economic impacts of tying our economy to finite resource development. All "booms" must "bust."
- The high global price of oil (a price the current economic crisis is dampening – but not for long) is fuelling the tar sands resource boom. Foreign investors can generate high profits, which creates a

financial boom, which makes the Canadian dollar very attractive to currency speculators. This has contributed significantly to the increase in value of the loonie, which had devastating impacts on the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

- The federal and Albertan governments are not collecting the royalties, taxes and other revenues needed to invest in diversifying our economy, or supporting vital social services and planning for the necessary transition to a low carbon economy.
- Canada has some of the lowest royalty rates in the world and public subsidies to the oil and gas industry persist. The federal government spends close to \$1 billion annually on subsidies to the oil and gas industry.
- Countries such as Norway collect two to three times more revenue per barrel of crude oil than Canadian jurisdictions.
- More than half of the tar sands is foreign-owned, including big oil businesses such as Exxon and Shell, as well as other countries' national oil companies, meaning energy profits are heading out of our country.

### **3. What do you think can or should be done about the social, environmental and health impacts of the tar sands?**

*Note: You can refer to the Council of Canadians fact sheet "5 reasons to support no new approvals in the tar sands" for more information on this topic.*

- Despite clear evidence that the tar sands are having serious social, environmental and economic impacts, expansion approvals and lease sales continue to be issued. The Harper government even made a cabinet decision to override a federal court decision concerning the adequacy of the federal and Albertan environmental impact assessment for the Kearl tar sands projects in order to move the project forward – the projected GHG emissions are the equivalent of the emissions from 800, 000 cars for the 50 year project!
- The Indigenous Environmental Network's Canadian Indigenous Tar Sands campaign calls for a moratorium on the tar sands development. The campaign for a moratorium would be in effect until the concerns of First Nations and Métis are addressed including: human rights abuses; human and ecological health crisis; climate change implications and adaptation; water and air quality concerns; clean up and restoration; treaty rights recognition; the tribal sovereignty and self-determination implications and the cumulative socio economic impacts on the health and way of life of Indigenous Peoples in the region.
- The tar sands projects dumps four billion litres of contaminated water into Alberta's groundwater and natural ecosystems every year. Toxins connected to tar sands production have been found as far downstream as the Athabasca Delta, one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world.
- The tar sands are the single largest contributor to growth in Canada's GHG emissions. "Business as usual" projections predict that emissions from tar sands projects will account for 12 per cent of total national emissions by 2020. Consider this scenario: if tar sands emissions rose as expected over the next two decades stabilizing in 2030 while Canada and U.S. emissions dropped by 80 per cent by 2050 (a target discussed at the recent G8 meeting), tar sands emissions would represent almost all of our country's emissions at that point! In an interview with the Montreal Gazette, Rajendra Pachauri, the head of the United Nations scientific panel on climate change said, "Canada should be doing more to tackle climate change, and should consider closing down the controversial oil sands projects in northern Alberta."

#### 4. How do you think you or your community can become involved in this issue?

- Help build the movement for a tar sands free future by spreading awareness in your community about the impacts of the tar sands. This includes actions such as information tabling, handing out fact sheets and leaflets, hosting public discussions and engaging in discussions with friends, family and co-workers. There are fact sheets and resources available on our tar sands webpage at [www.canadians.org/tarsands](http://www.canadians.org/tarsands)
- Your bank account may be funding global warming, including providing financial support for ongoing tar sands developments. Want to know how much your bank accounts are adding to your carbon emissions? Go to <http://climatefriendlybanking.com/> to calculate your bank carbon footprint and find out more about your bank's investments. The Rainforest Action Network's tar sands campaign targets RBC as the top financier of tar sands projects in petitions, events and days of actions. Find out how you can participate at: [http://ran.org/campaigns/freedom\\_from\\_oil/spotlight/tar\\_sands/](http://ran.org/campaigns/freedom_from_oil/spotlight/tar_sands/)
- Join the Council of Canadians Campaign for a Tar Sands Free Future. Go to [www.canadians.org/tarsands](http://www.canadians.org/tarsands) for updates on events, resources and actions that you can participate in.
- Building a tar sands free future means getting off our addiction to oil. We can all play a role in reducing our reliance on oil and supporting alternative, more sustainable energy. Find out what's happening locally to build a green community. Drive less, walk, bike and use public transit instead. Opt to buy local and support your farmers market. Support local "greening" initiatives such as recycling, conservation programs, improving the energy efficiency of your communities' buildings and locally based renewable power projects such as public institutions (hospitals, municipal buildings, arenas) hosting solar panels and small wind turbines.
- Join the Council of Canadians Climate (of) Change: Climate Justice for People and the Planet campaign – go to [www.canadians.org/climatejustice](http://www.canadians.org/climatejustice) for updates on events, resources and actions.