



Tories eliminate government climate policy group



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OTTAWA — Environment Canada has eliminated a working group that played a key role in shaping climate-change policy -- a move that sources say is an example of the Conservative government's zeal to wrest control from public servants over an increasingly politicized issue.

A memo obtained by The Canadian Press outlines a new organizational structure for the department -- and it no longer includes the Climate Change Policy

Directorate.

The memo came out March 1 just as Prime Minister Stephen Harper embarked on a national tour to announce a series of green initiatives that were largely prepared by the division now being dismantled.

The directorate consisted of a handful of experts responsible for implementing new policy, co-ordinating climate-change efforts among different government departments, and analyzing their potential impact.

Consolidating in the PMO?

Two departmental sources said the change is motivated by a desire to consolidate power in the Prime Minister's Office.

"People who used to work on climate-change policy are all being regrouped -- some into stakeholder engagement, some went into economic analysis. They're all being farmed off," said a bureaucrat who requested anonymity.

"The (policy) work now is being done by a very small handful of people under the direct supervision of (the Privy Council Office) and PMO."

"Even the people working here say, 'Who's really accountable for making climate change policy anymore?' Right now we don't know who's accountable."

But spokesmen for the department said the change is a simple reorganization aimed at improving efficiency and they insisted that the number of officials working on climate policy will not decrease.

"The work (on climate change) has not stopped. It has continued and is ongoing," said departmental spokesman Mark Colpitts.

Bob Quinn, director general of communications with Environment Canada, flatly denied any political interference. He said the decision to reorganize was made solely by the department's assistant deputy minister for strategic policy.

And he said Deputy Minister Michael Horgan never discussed the matter with the PMO or the environment minister.

Harper has toured the country in recent days announcing transfers from a \$1.5-billion national fund for climate-change initiatives. He has also promised to announce hard targets for greenhouse-gas reduction within a month, and was in Ontario to make an unrelated \$225-million pledge Wednesday to help preserve ecologically sensitive lands.

But department sources say many of the new measures were already in place under the previous Liberal government and were designed in large part by the office that's now being disbanded.

Some of the measures include:

- An east-west power grid linking Manitoba to Ontario, for which Harper announced \$586 million in funding at an event in Toronto last week.
- \$156 million in federal funding for carbon disposal in the Alberta oil sands, announced by Harper in Edmonton last week.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion said even Wednesday's announcement was a rehash of a plan to create a \$200-million Pierre Elliott Trudeau Nature Conservation Foundation when he was environment minister.

The Liberals called the structural change just another rebranding exercise from a government that recycles old ideas and passes them off as its own.

"They're pursuing a campaign of propaganda like we've never seen before at the federal level," said Liberal environment critic David McGuinty.

"They're trying to simply discard all of the former climate change programming . . . and trying to deny that

there was a previous government."

One of the bureaucrats who spoke on background agreed.

"Almost word for word, everything being set up was already negotiated and ready to go. It's just being repackaged. These are the same announcements being rolled out."

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