

May 19, 2016

Dear members of the McGill Board of Governors:

We write to express dismay that you voted to continue investing university funds in fossil fuel companies, and thereby to deny the central demand of the Divest McGill petition. You based your decision on a report that fails to meet the standards of rigorous analysis, backed by solid evidence, that the governing body of a major international university must uphold. The report by the Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility (CAMSR) applies unreasonable and inconsistent criteria, employs fallacious arguments, and fails to supply any evidence to support its assertions, including the astonishing claim that global warming has so far caused no grave harm.

For example, the report completely absolves producers from responsibility for the harms caused by others' consumption of their products. It holds fossil fuel companies responsible for only the 10-20% of greenhouse-gas emissions caused by their own consumption of fossil fuel, and not at all for other end users' consumption. Applying this same kind of test to tobacco companies would have absolved them of any responsibility for harm from smoking. McGill's previous divestment from tobacco invalidated this criterion. The report also contradicts itself, by first asking simply whether grave injurious impacts "result from the activities of a company (or companies)", but then arbitrarily re-framing the question two pages later, as whether those impacts result "primarily" from those activities. Again, McGill's honorable history of divestment counters this re-framing. Were the harms of South African apartheid due primarily to the activities of the particular companies McGill divested from several decades ago? Certainly not.

Independent from the issue of who is responsible for global warming, is the question of whether the harms caused by it are grave. The report contends that they are not. What basis does CAMSR provide for this astounding claim? The report nowhere specifies the injuries that have already occurred. The only grounds offered for concluding that current harms are not grave are that

the most pronounced and harmful effects of climate change have not yet been experienced, and may not happen if the Paris agreement goal is achieved and concerted related action is taken. If the most pronounced effects materialize, it will involve a measurable worsening of conditions from present levels and will occur in the future. **In this context** grave injurious impact is a threshold which arguably has not been reached and can yet be avoided. (Page 8, boldface added for emphasis.)

Is it really necessary to point out the fallacy of inferring, from the mere fact that things can get worse, that they are not already grave? If CAMSR had taken its job seriously, it would have considered – and cited – harms such as the following. The United Nations' World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that global warming already kills 150,000 people each year, by exacerbating such ills as malnutrition, heat waves, floods, storms, fires, droughts, diarrhea, and malaria. And the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) indicts global warming as the main threat facing hundreds of wild vertebrate species, whose populations have collapsed by an average of 52% over the past few decades.

The specific problems discussed above are but a small subset of the many deep flaws in the report, and therefore your decision based on it. Since CAMSR has clearly failed to fulfill its mandate, we demand that you re-constitute it as soon as possible, with:

1. A completely different set of members (except for those serving *ex officio*);
2. A directive to carry out a much more transparent process of deliberation involving extensive public input on a new draft report; and
3. A requirement to apply intellectual standards even higher than the impressive level achieved by Divest McGill in the petition they submitted in February 2015. This entails reasonable and consistent criteria, sound arguments, and conscientious gathering and citation of the best available evidence.

Sincerely,

(listed in alphabetical order by faculty/school)

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