

# British Columbia misrepresents liquified natural gas as 'clean' fossil fuel

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Despite worldwide concern about the consequences of "fracking," the British Columbia (B.C.) government is presenting its proposed Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) industry as both an economic benefit to the Canadian province and a source of 'clean' fossil fuel.

Writing in the journal *Environmental Communication*, Sibo Chen and Associate Professor Shane Gunster from Simon Fraser University, analyze text and images from the regional government's "[LNG in B.C.](#)" website—the main source of public information about the project to extract LNG via [hydraulic fracturing](#) and export it to Asia.

As Chen and Gunster note, the website copy "improbably but effectively" positions LNG as the opposite of other [fossil fuels](#) – positioning [natural gas](#) as a clean alternative to oil and coal, and part of the pathway to what it calls a "low carbon future."

The concept of "clean" is repeatedly expressed on the website through textual and visual signifiers. Even the project's logo – leaf-like in shape and light green in colour – suggests environmental friendliness.

But in order to "sell" LNG as "clean," the website has also adopted many of the criticisms levelled at other fossil fuels, notably the tar/oil sands of Alberta, Canada. The authors write: "The immateriality of natural gas – a substance that one cannot smell, touch or feel – is invoked to reinforce its conceptual and affective distance and difference from the dense, toxic, and corrosive materiality of coal and bitumen in which the

sensuous properties of these substances have been, discursively, inextricably bound together with their impacts as pollutants."

"The idea, in other words, is that [natural gas drilling](#) has a small, almost imperceptible footprint – like the gas it produces, this industrial activity is largely ethereal— and will, therefore, have a minimal, almost imperceptible, impact upon the pristine wilderness of northern B.C."

When it comes to dealing with the risks of LNG on its website, Chen and Gunster hold that the government takes the view that having information, or what they present as "facts", is sufficient. More emphasis is placed on being ready and able to take advantage of the many benefits a thriving LNG industry would bring – but which, in reality, are based on the contested view that the Asian economy is both in need of energy and desires an alternative to coal to tackle its pollution issues.

This article provides a fascinating insight into how governments create narratives to "sell" unpopular concepts to the public. It also shows that how we will achieve our promised "low carbon future" is still far from clear.

**More information:** Sibó Chen et al. "Ethereal Carbon": legitimizing liquefied natural gas in British Columbia, *Environmental Communication* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/17524032.2015.1133435](https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2015.1133435)

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