UPDATE: Canada Steps Backward on Climate Policy, Study Says

By Cassie Werber

LONDON—Canada is the only country out of 33 developed and developing nations to have taken a step backward in terms of climate legislation over the past year, ending 2012 with fewer policies related to climate change than it had last January, according to an international study published Monday.

A spokesman for Canada’s environment minister said the government “completely disputes” the study’s findings.

The GLOBE Climate Legislation Initiative—a group of legislators from 33 countries that aims to support national governments in development of climate-related policy—commissioned the study, which it released and discussed at a London summit this week.

The report is the third of its kind by GLOBE and the largest. Of the countries studied, 18 made “substantial progress” in 2012, according to a briefing note. Fourteen others showed “limited developments.”

The note also said: “Only one country regressed...Canada, which repealed the Kyoto Implementation Act following its withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol.”

Canada announced its plan to withdraw from Kyoto, a set of binding targets on emissions reduction, in December 2011, and officially repealed the act that implemented its targets under the Protocol on June 29, 2012. As a result, “Canada has no comprehensive climate change legislation,” the GLOBE report said.

The first stage of the Kyoto Protocol expired Dec. 31. Legislators are seeking to reach another internationally binding agreement by 2015.

Canada’s decision to abandon its “flagship” legislation was “a sad scandal,” said John Gummer, the GLOBE president and a former Conservative U.K. secretary of state for the environment between 1993-1997.

Adam Sweet, a spokesman for Canadian Environment Minister Peter Kent, said the Canadian government is committed to address climate change “in a way that is fair, effective and comprehensive,” without endangering economic growth. He added the government is making progress on its goal to reduce Canadian carbon output by 17% below 2005 level by 2020, but more work would be required. At present, the Canadian government is working to implement a sector-by-sector regulatory approach required to meet the target.

Mr. Gummer, who is also a member of the Committee on Climate Change, a U.K. policy advisory group, also said he was “ashamed as a Conservative” of the action taken by the Canadian government, a conservative administration led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

“The sort of conservatism that has been shown in Canada is aberrant to the traditional conservative attitude,” Mr. Gummer told Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal.

Byron Wilfert, one of Canada’s representatives at the GLOBE summit, said that the Canadian government’s decision to withdraw from Kyoto was “extremely disappointing.” But he said that decisions made at the national level should not mask more grass-roots progress, such as that taking place through city administrations:

At “the sub-national level...there is progress being made. In a federated state, it’s probably not surprising that that’s the case, unlike unitary states such as France,” Wilfert said.

-Paul Vieira contributed to this article

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