

**ANALYZING ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS & THE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLITICS OF THE TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE EXPANSION PROJECT**

by

Anna Gabriela Doebeli

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

in

INTEGRATED SCIENCES

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Vancouver

April 2020

© Anna Gabriela Doebeli, 2020

Abstract

In this paper, I use the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project (Trans Mountain) as a case study through which to examine the Canadian Environmental Assessment (EA) process. I conduct a qualitative content analysis and use inductive coding to analyze the disagreements and justifications presented in Trans Mountain EAs, particularly around the pipeline construction's impacts on climate change and marine environments. While the EAs conclude that Trans Mountain would result in significant adverse impacts on the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whale, the EAs do not consider any other adverse environmental impacts to be significant. The EAs use three main justifications for this decision: that mitigation neutralizes impacts, that marine animals are unlikely to be present, and that impacts are negligible compared to existing infrastructure. I argue that EAs use constrained scoping and inconsistent references to uncertainty in ways that neutralize the environmental risk that Trans Mountain poses and diffuse proponent responsibility. I connect my analysis of the Trans Mountain pipeline to existing critical EA literature to suggest that EA science serves to obfuscate underlying drivers of species decline, excluding habitat destruction from consideration for instance, and that EA baselines foreclose the possibility of ecosystem recovery. Ultimately, my analysis highlights some limitations in the Trans Mountain EA process. Analyzing the EA process points to areas for legislative and regulatory improvement, and facilitates a better understanding of the ways in which the state mediates its relationship to the environmental and is complicit for climate and ecological crises.