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The tides roll in, the tides roll out. There's not much we humans can do about them – as King Canute (or Knut) noted centuries ago when he commanded an incoming tide not to wet his feet -- except to build seawalls and dykes to prevent high water from damaging our land.

Which is what Vancouver did over the last century. Seawalls along English Bay and around Stanley Park protect some of the most valuable recreational land in Canada's most expensive city.

Those seawalls did their job well. Until December 17, 2012. That morning, an unusually high tide surged over the Kitsilano seawall, flooded the Kitsilano swimming pool, and washed away a particularly popular section of beach.

Vancouver considers this a harbinger of things to come. If current climate change scenarios have any validity at all, ocean levels will rise. How much? Who knows. Maybe only a few inches. But couple that rise with the increasing severity of storms – Hurricane Sandy drove a four-metre surge ashore – and Vancouver's shoreline could be in deep trouble.

The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) ranks Vancouver in the world's top 15 for potential damage from rising sea-levels. Vancouver International airport, much of the harbour, and hundreds of thousands of homes in Richmond and Surrey, could all end up underwater.

So Vancouver seeks federal funds to improve its protection. Earlier this year, the federal government signed “a 10-year deal to continue turning over parts of the federal gas-tax fund to B.C. cities, totalling \$2.7 billion by 2024,” the *Globe and Mail* reported.

The Union of B.C. Municipalities defined guidelines for those federal funds. But climate change does not qualify as an “eligible project category”.

Granted, nothing prevents Vancouver from investing its own tax revenues to hold back the tides. But it seems ironic that a city has to use local monies to combat a global problem, while national funding is restricted to local projects.

Tragically, all bureaucratic institutions suffer from a delayed-action effect. The stone drops; the splash occurs some time later.

Bureaucratic organizations, you see, need time to overcome their own inertia. By the time they're ready to react, King Canute is being washed out to sea.

Vancouver, with its ankles already in the ocean, perceives a need. Inland municipalities don't. Not yet. Although some may face their own flooding challenges, as glaciers in the Rocky Mountains melt faster, or as extreme storms dump months-worth of rain in a few days. Others, paradoxically, will face water shortages, as Vancouver Island's glaciers disappear entirely.

Even when B.C. municipalities get around to a unified position, the ripple will still have to spread through provincial and federal agencies. Mandates will need amendment. New legislation will have to be drafted, and voted on by elected representatives. Who will come under pressure from corporations, lobbying for their own benefit.

Witness the reaction of Trans Mountain Pipelines to another Vancouver application.

Trans Mountain wants permission to twin an existing pipeline that delivers crude oil from Alberta to a tank farm and loading facility at the east end of Vancouver's ocean inlet. The \$5.4 billion project would triple the amount of oil shipped.

Vancouver asked the National Energy Board to consider the implications of all this additional burning of fossil fuels on climate change. Trans Mountain's lawyers argued that climate change issues are outside the NEB's jurisdiction.

They're right, of course. No one considered possible climate effects when the NEB's terms of reference were defined, decades ago.

And they will stay outside those terms of reference until climate change ceases to be a topic people hesitate to talk about because someone else may disagree with them.

A friend served as a missionary in Nigeria. In all the news coverage of Boko Haram's recent abduction of 300 schoolgirls, he says, he has seen not one reference to climate change. It's all about Islamic extremists.

Yet climate change lies at the root of the unrest, he says. Northern Nigeria used to be cattle country. But the Sahara desert is spreading southwards. When cattle no longer have grass to graze on, a tribal way of life dies. Angry and aimless young men get sucked into an organization that gives them a focus for their anger – whether it's against the wealthy tribes in Nigeria's oil-rich south, or the industrial world that supplies their wealth.

Americans in general – generalizations are risky, but also valuable -- believe in Islamic extremists. They don't believe in climate change, yet. Or in gun control. Or same-sex marriage. Or equal rights, equal pay, and equal opportunity for women.

That's why any news story about these issues always includes a rebuttal, no matter how ill-informed.

As long as a stridently vocal minority denies the reality, let alone the urgency, of such issues, the delayed-action lag grows.

Meanwhile, the tides keep rising.

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