Abstract  Over the past forty years environmental assessment has become one of our main tools for better informed and more farsighted decision making. It has spread to jurisdictions at every level around the world and the leading edge of practice has advanced significantly, especially in Canada. But it has not been enough: our world is still sliding deeper into unsustainability. One implication is that environmental assessment requirements need to be more demanding and more powerful. They need to help deliver a transition away from the current path to future options that are significantly more equitable and respectful of biospheric capacities. Unfortunately, many entrenched interests are dependent on business as usual approaches and are also stressed by multiple competing demands, global power shifts, and a wobbly financial system. They are understandably devoted to the established growth-based solutions; hostile to uncertainty, complexity and delay; and inclined to eliminate, narrow and streamline assessment obligations to the extent possible. The talk will explore sustainability-based assessment as a response to the evident tensions facing environmental assessment, recognizing that assessment conflicts are merely one face of a larger phenomenon.

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