

Energy Strategy for Nova Scotia: Submission

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December 9, 2007

The first and most important part of the solution in Nova Scotia for our future energy security and action to reverse the negative impacts of climate change begins with lowering consumption. Encouraging conservation through legislation for both business and individuals is an important role of the government. Programs which encourage the transition from fossil fuels as an energy source to renewables is also very important.

Electricity

Electrical energy comprises about 25% of the energy used in a typical Nova Scotia home where space heating is not come from electricity. How this is generated, distributed and sold is important to:

- how we meet our short and long-term electrical needs
- how we add/or not to the problem of climate change
- how air pollution contributes to provincial health care costs
- how we promote rural economic development

The transition to generating electricity from small scale renewable sources needs to start in order to minimize the current environmental, health and economic development costs of generation. Legislation changing the 'feed laws' is the single most important action needed. High line losses would also be reduced by using small scale electrical energy closer to where it is produced.

The problem is fundamentally due to the fact we are not following the principles of a market based economy. Nova Scotia Power (NSP) has a monopoly on the generation, distribution and sale of electrical energy in Nova Scotia. They have no competition and therefore can choose to ignore the environmental, health and local economic development costs. Politicians have continued to support NSP purely on the assurance they can deliver the energy as needed with little regard for the other costs. NSP should not be allowed to continue to control the generation, distribution and sale of electrical energy in Nova Scotia. It should be in the hands of three different entities.

We will continue to contribute to the problems of climate change burning coal to generate electricity. Eighty percent of our electricity comes from coal. If all the environmental costs of burning coal were included in the price, as in a market based economy, renewable energy such as wind, solar, biomass or hydro would be competitive.

Higher healthcare costs will continue to increase from the air pollution generated by burning coal. If related healthcare costs with the additional environmental costs of burning coal were included in a true market based economy coal would not be competitive as a fuel source.

Rural economic development can increase with the manufacture, installation and maintenance of renewable energy equipment. The sun, wind, biomass and hydro are all plentiful in rural areas. Rural communities and individuals have a right to the economic benefits of becoming energy producers. In order for that to happen there will need to be legislation to change the 'feed laws' in Nova Scotia.

NSP's present billing methods encourage consumption. When base rates are included in the per kilowatt hour (/kwh) cost of electricity the cost is higher for those using less electricity. In my personal case using about 10 kilowatt hours per day I pay about .14/kwh whereas my neighbour who uses four times as much electricity at 40 kwh per day pays less than .12/kwh.

'Feed laws' are the single most important change to quicken the transition to renewable energy. NSP is the biggest barrier to this change because their profits largely stem from operating a centralized monopoly which continues to use a fuel damaging to Nova Scotia's environment and economy. Changes to feed laws would require NSP to pay small energy producers a reasonable return on their investment encouraging further development of small scale renewable energy. NSP's present net-metering program does not allow small producers to make any profit and in fact NSP, acting as a monopoly, takes any credits earned at the end of each year to contribute to their own profits.

Transportation

On transportation the Nova Scotia Government needs to stop putting so much of our resources into encouraging private automobile use by:

- lowering highway speed limits to encourage fuel savings
- stop twinning 100 series highways which encourages private automobile use
- create a province wide public transportation system particularly for the economically disadvantaged
- higher taxes on fuel inefficient vehicles/ incentives for fuel efficiency
- change existing vehicle laws allowing low-speed all-electric vehicles on our roads

Building Heating

On building heating we need to lower consumption first. Government must play a central role in this through:

- conservation programs and incentives such as interest free loans.
- fully utilizing the wealth of knowledge and experience of the Ecology Action Centre (EAC). Government should direct more resources to EAC and accept their criticism as being based on the public good.
- encouraging the transformation away from fossil fuel use to small scale renewables is important in building heating for the same reasons given above for electrical generation
- tax home heating fuel to encourage lower consumption utilizing the extra revenue to assist those suffering under escalating energy costs
- building code changes could demand conservation through passive solar, energy efficient designs with small scale renewable energy equipment

Business & Industry

Energy consumption and related environmental impacts should be established as bench marks for existing and new businesses. Incentives and penalties should be put in place by government to encourage lower levels in both consumption and environmental impacts.

Government

Government needs to show leadership through visible action. All government operations need to fully assess their consumption of resources and environmental impacts. Publicly stated targets for reduction would demonstrate to the public of government leadership in lowering consumption. This could become part of government education toward widespread conservation in the province. The government should also lead by example in the transition from fossil fuels to small scale renewable energy. Installing thermal solar panels on the roofs of government buildings is one good example. Programs which encourage the same type action on all public buildings should be put in place (schools, municipal buildings, fire halls, community centers, churches etc.).

Government also needs to lead through action by showing support for renewable energy, particularly small scale. This could be done through incentives to manufacturers, small installation companies, homeowners, community groups and municipalities involved in setting up renewable energy systems.

Conclusion:

To help make Nova Scotia's energy sources more sustainable and resistant to outside pressures, whether economic or environmental, there needs to be a real effort to promote and develop renewable resources. Monies that are spent on this now can only be a wise investment. Sooner or later we will have to adopt these more sustainable technologies and it has been shown that countries (or provinces) that first develop or install new methods are usually the ones that can manufacture and export their expertise to other areas creating many skilled jobs. Many of these technologies will more than pay for themselves, since the resource is free and renewable, and many new jobs will be created for the installation, maintenance and further development of these systems. The government should take a very proactive role in making this transition as soon as possible.

Note: The 'Energy Strategy' included offshore gas which is largely exported because we have very little distribution infrastructure in the province. Uranium mined in Nova Scotia would also be for export because we do not make nuclear bombs and we do not have any nuclear power plants in the province. Mining and exporting uranium would leave us with all the unresolved problems of dealing with the radio-active wastes. If we were to allow uranium mining in Nova Scotia we would severely damage our local environment through land, water and air-borne radio-active pollution. The Nova Scotia government must enact legislation placing a moratorium on uranium mining in the province – the risks are just too high.