

To:
Nova Scotia Department of Energy
Energy Strategy/Climate Change Action Plan
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From:
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I have already submitted comments as part of the public consultation process for Nova Scotia's Energy Strategy and Climate Change Action Plan.

At this time, I am submitting the text of an article that appeared in The Chronicle Herald newspaper in 2006. This article is entirely relevant to the creation of a new Energy Strategy for Nova Scotia. I am in agreement with this article. Please consider it an addition to my previously submitted comments.

From:
The Chronicle Herald
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Wednesday November 8, 2006

Wind could be engine of rural rebirth

By BOB WILLIAMS

There's no denying that renewable energy is a very hot topic in Nova Scotia, and rightly so. Recently, in a single week alone, this newspaper published opinion pieces by freelance journalist Ralph Surette, Dalhousie professor Larry Hughes and NSP President and CEO Ralph Tedesco.

While these writers represent vastly different biases and may espouse differing solutions, it cannot be argued that for years, Nova Scotia has been faced with major issues regarding the long-term provision of non-polluting, sustainable, secure and competitive energy. What's currently causing all the uproar is that, over this same time frame, little has been done to overhaul our energy policy and regulatory environment, which is required to turn the situation around.

But there is an equally important aspect of this renewable energy issue, which is wrongly being ignored. And that is the ongoing social and economic decline in many rural communities created by the loss of brains, talent and money to regions offering more stable and lucrative employment and investment opportunities. It is considered a major problem and tremendous amounts of publicly funded financial and human resources are constantly being directed toward economic and community development in an ongoing effort to "stem the tide."

Two things need to be recognized here: First, that Nova Scotia has abundant supplies of renewable energy including solar, tidal and, most important, a world-class wind energy regime; second, that the development of Nova Scotia's sorely needed renewable energy policy can, if done correctly, effectively stimulate the viable development of clean energy while simultaneously acting as a catalyst for substantial community revitalization.

This approach is not revolutionary, nor does it involve great risk. It has proven extremely effective in European countries such as Germany, Spain and most notably Denmark, for nearly 25 years. The policies they crafted were done with two primary objectives – to stimulate the development of clean, renewable energy and to do so in a manner that favoured co-operative and community ownership.

The policies that were adopted targeted two broad areas: financial incentives and a secure marketing mechanism. The financial incentives included a combination of subsidies and tax breaks which vary depending on the political flavour of the day.

The supply of energy was secured by the adoption of a simple regulatory mechanism known either as an Advanced Renewable Tariff or a Standard Offer Contract. Inherent is the right to connect to "the grid" and a legal requirement for the electrical utilities to buy the energy supplied and to pay a guaranteed, fair price.

The results have been outstanding. In fact, today these three countries account for nearly two-thirds of the world's wind power. In Denmark alone, there are 5,500 wind turbines and over 100,000 households that own shares in local wind

energy installations. Most of these installations were built by local co-operatives, farmers or community organizations. Nationwide, wind is big business in Denmark. The effect on these rural regions and their residents is profound.

It is fair to ask, "But will that approach work here in Nova Scotia?" Is that not yesterday in Europe and this is today in North America, where we favour mega-sized, centralized development by mega-sized industry for mega-sized returns?

Recently, Ontario, the industrial heartland of Canada, was faced with this same situation. And it came to the same conclusion – namely, community-owned, renewable energy makes great dollars and sense. As of this spring, the Ontario government adopted policies that would not only ensure a guaranteed market for renewable energy, but simultaneously create the environment for development of distributed community-owned energy projects. It did this by adopting a Standard Offer Contract regulation with a cap of 10 MW project size. This Ontario program has been called the most progressive renewable energy policy in North America in decades. Wind developers have turned their efforts toward Ontario, to the extent that there are now over 240 applications for grid connections of small wind projects that could result in nearly 2,400 MW of wind power available to the grid.

Nova Scotia is at a fork in the road. We have a wind energy resource that is recognized and envied throughout the world. Our communities and surrounding farms are facing serious decline. We can choose to develop renewable energy policies that will ensure future maximum benefit for our communities and citizens, or we can steadfastly continue to gaze at our navels while Alberta or Ontario or foreign interests gain control of our natural resources. If we do the latter, it'll be for their maximum benefit while our small communities continue to wither.

Bob Williams is the director of operations for the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council, the body representing Nova Scotia's 400 co-operatives and credit unions.