



Shifting the balance of power

Nova Scotia is working on a big move to renewable energy, with hard targets in the short to medium term

By Rob Antle



For a long time in Nova Scotia, coal was undeniably king. The mines of Cape Breton provided the bulk of the province's power. But those days are over. The last large coal mine in the region shuttered a decade ago. And now, Nova Scotia is going down the road to a greener future. The government has legislated hard targets to replace dirty energy with cleaner power, and penalties if those targets are not met.

"It's an investment in clean, green renewable energy, and we believe it's the right way to go," Energy Minister Charlie Parker said in an interview. "In the end, it will be less expensive than fossil fuels."

To foster this change, Nova Scotia's renewable electricity plan sets goals of 25 per cent renewable electricity by 2015, and 40 per cent by 2020.

There are penalties set out in the regulations of up to \$500,000 per day or \$10 million a year if those renewable targets are not met.

Nova Scotia has a long tradition of producing electricity by burning coal. Until very recently, according to Parker,

almost 80 per cent of the energy used in the province came from coal, petroleum-coke or fuel oil.

Parker noted that made some sense in the days when Nova Scotia was supporting its domestic coal industry, and before the province understood its environmental costs.

But now most of the coal burned in Nova Scotia is imported, resulting in millions being spent outside the province. "It makes us vulnerable to increasing costs and concerns about stability of supply," Parker noted in a recent speech to energy industry interests in Halifax. "In fact, in the last five years coal prices have increased over 75 per cent."

And while the coal is now imported, Nova Scotia remains "blessed" with a supply of natural resources, including wind, tides, farms and forests.

The government commissioned a study to weigh the province's power options. That study concluded that investing in renewable energy was the best choice going forward. While there would be marginal upfront price increases, according to Parker, the

payoff would be decades of stable rates in the future.

Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter stressed that the targeted shift to renewables has become "matters of law."

The province's plan, Dexter told the Core All Energy conference in Halifax in October, "lays out the path to get there. Regulations are in place, the feed-in tariffs have been established, and more is on the way."

In fact, Dexter noted, the community feed-in tariff program "is being lauded around the world" for its approach to maximizing use of the existing distribution capacity while building community support for renewable projects.

The government received more than 70 applications for that community feed-in tariff, or COMFIT, program.

The overall renewable energy plan calls for Nova Scotia to more than double the amount of its renewable energy supply between the end of 2009 and 2015, and nearly quadruple it between the end of 2009 and 2020.

The government says wind projects will



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be “the mainstay” of its efforts to reach its 2015 target, with some support from limited amounts of biomass.

To reach the 2020 goal, there are a number of options on the planning table. Those include intermittent resources such as wind and tidal, firmed up by natural gas. The province calls tidal the “sleeping giant” among Nova Scotia’s potential renewable power sources.

Then there is imported clean hydro power. Nova Scotia, through energy giant Emera Inc., will get a share of energy from the planned Muskrat Falls hydro project on Labrador’s Lower Churchill River, in exchange for building a subsea link to Newfoundland. That chunk of electricity is equivalent to about eight per cent of Nova Scotia’s entire domestic power needs. Muskrat Falls is scheduled to come online in 2017. In addition to the block of energy guaranteed as part of the deal, Nova Scotia also has the option to buy excess power from Muskrat.

Other than strict renewable power, Nova Scotia has plans to increase its use of natural gas, which is a fossil fuel, but

a much cleaner-burning one than oil and coal.

There has been positive reaction to the plan.

“We welcome Premier Dexter’s announcement to legislate a 40 per cent renewable electricity target, as it will further Nova Scotia’s laudable efforts to replace coal power with energy from renewable sources,” Tim Weis, director of the Pembina Institute’s renewable energy program, said last year. “This further demonstrates that Nova Scotians are serious about reducing their contribution to air pollution and climate change emissions ...

“To meet the 2020 goal, renewable energy use in Nova Scotia would grow by almost 400 per cent from its current levels. The Dexter government’s commitment to clean energy in Nova Scotia is an investment in the future that will start creating jobs and reducing emissions throughout the province today.”

And the province believes it is up to the challenge of hitting its targets.

“We have every confidence we will meet that goal,” Parker said. |ABM

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