



Ecology Action Centre Presentation on Bill 212

Public Utilities Act (amended)

Monday, October 31st, 2022

Jacob Thompson BAsc. MSc.

We acknowledge we are gathered here today on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Mi'kmaq people, past, present, and future stewards of this land.

My name is Jacob Thompson, I am an Energy Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre (EAC). I have a Bachelor of Applied Science degree from Acadia University with a focus in civil engineering, and a Master of Science from Saint Mary's University focusing on 100% decarbonization scenarios of electricity, heating/cooling, including both personal and freight transportation.

Today I will be speaking to both the concerns and hope I have for Bill 212, the Act to Amend Chapter 380 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Public Utilities Act.

Our focus at the EAC is ensuring Nova Scotians have clean, affordable, and reliable energy. The focus of this presentation to law amendments is to ask a constructively critical question about Clause 3, which sets out to limit the net rate increases to all rate classes to 1.8% over the next couple of years except fuel, purchased power, and DSM, which require an increase to improve reliability.

There are a lot of investments that need to be made by different stakeholders – including substantial investments from Nova Scotia Power and the government of Nova Scotia – to reach net zero targets, and ensure that Nova Scotia is doing its fair share towards goals of the Paris Agreement. We are concerned that with a rate increase restricted to 1.8 % over 2 years, the money needed investments in renewable technology, storage solutions such as batteries, work to both strengthen existing and build new transmission infrastructure which will be needed as other sectors decarbonize will not be available. To ensure that this transition can happen quickly, both demand side management and investment in renewables will be needed.

It is very important that all Nova Scotians can afford their power bills and recognize that the government is looking to protect all Nova Scotians from an increase on their bills; but I want to ask if this is the only way to protect Nova Scotians? Is there a better way that considers both affordability and sustainability as not opposing forces but as synergistic?

I attended the Utility and Review Board or UARB General Rate Application hearing sessions in September and listened to all stakeholders across sectors, including the

Consumer Advocate, Small Business Advocate, statements from the Industrial Group, and opening statements from leaders of the provincial government and Intervenors speaking to affordability. These advocates serve important roles in holding the UARB accountable to the people of Nova Scotia.

The Ecology Action Centre has released positions on coal phaseout and greening the grid with renewables such as wind and solar, and are advocating for the province of Nova Scotia to align with the Federal commitment of net-zero electricity by 2035. For decades we have also advocated for investment in Demand Side Management as one of the best and most affordable options, which increases efficiency of the grid and decreases the amount of energy needed by consumers. An increase in funding for demand side management which supports low and medium income households in decarbonizing is essential.



The EAC does not see the current amendments proposed to Bill 212 as sufficient to protect Nova Scotians from increasing prices of fossil fuels, and would propose those gathered here today support a much more holistic update to the Utilities Act. We strongly recommend adding a Sustainability Advocate to the UARB process – alongside the important consumer advocate – as well as including a Sustainability Mandate within the act. Systems thinking will be needed to ensure that the large transition to clean green electricity which is needed in Nova Scotia will be inclusive of all, and not place an undue burden on those who are experiencing energy poverty. Therefore we would propose the Utilities Act be amended to ensure that a systemic view is used, and that climate action and impacts are mainstreamed within the act. A Sustainability Advocate and Sustainability Mandate would ensure that decisions made resulting from the act ensure emissions reductions and affordability for consumers go hand in hand and are prioritized within all spending and decision making. We call on the Nova Scotia government to include this modification, and work out details within the upcoming release of the Climate Plan for Clean Growth, which is slated for release by the end of 2022.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our recommendations for your considerations today.

Sincerely,
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