

Dunderdale says N.S. government needs to 'get up to scratch' on Muskrat Falls

'Big shift in position', for Liberals, Dunderdale says

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Premier Kathy Dunderdale said she's not worried about the Maritime Link, because once the Nova Scotia Liberals understand the deal, they're bound to support it.

At the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (UARB), Nova Scotia Energy Minister Andrew Younger presented eight conditions for the government to support the Maritime Link portion of the Muskrat Falls project.

He said that as the deal currently stands, he just can't support it.

"The document as submitted does not go far enough in terms of protecting ratepayers. It's as simple as that," Younger said Monday.

But on Tuesday, responding to questions from the Liberals here in Newfoundland and Labrador, Dunderdale said that the Nova Scotia government just needs to understand the project better.

"They're trying to wrap their heads around it; they're trying to understand it fairly quickly because this process is ongoing," she said. "They need to get up to scratch." The original Muskrat Falls deal was inked between Nalcor and Nova Scotia utility Emera three years ago, when New Democrat premier Darrell Dexter was at the helm in Nova Scotia.

But in October, N.S. voters sent Dexter packing, and replaced him with Liberal Stephen McNeil, who's been deeply critical of the Maritime Link portion of the Muskrat Falls project.

Dunderdale said she understands that as an opposition party, the Liberals in Nova Scotia were against the Muskrat Falls deal as it currently stands, but now that they're in government, she said they need to adopt a different point of view.

"It's a big shift in position for them," she said.

"They campaigned against the project, so it's a big piece now to reorient yourself from a different perspective from a government as opposed to an opposition trying to get elected."

She said opposition parties — in Nova Scotia, and here at home as well — haven't been given all of the information that the government has.

"There's a lot of confidential information here; ministers spend days dealing with this — weeks, months, years dealing with it — that wasn't the case when they were in opposition," she said.

"When we would go to Nova Scotia on a regular basis to talk to the government, we would also take time to talk to the opposition, but they're certainly not grounded in the facts and the nuts and bolts in the same way that the government would have been"

In the meantime, she said the government has already addressed some of the concerns that Nova Scotia is raising, and there's nothing going on that can't be dealt with.

"There's nothing in it that is concerning to us," Dunderdale said.

Opposition Leader Dwight Ball said that with contracts awarded and work already underway, Nova Scotia has the province in a barrel.

"How did it get so bad that this province is spending \$1 million a day and the province of Nova Scotia is responsible for zero? How is this not a weak bargaining position or negotiating position for our ratepayers?" Ball asked in the House of Assembly.

And as for the notion that opposition parties don't have all the facts, Ball said that if there's something that would convince him that it's a good, solid deal for the province, he hopes Dunderdale will share it.

"If she's got facts that I haven't seen, well, maybe now is the time to put it out there," he said.