

UPDATE: Premier, Nalcor applaud UARB decision

More response to Nova Scotia regulator's OK for power link to NL

The Telegram

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Premier Kathy Dunderdale is quite happy with the news the Nova Scotia Utilities and Review Board (UARB) has given the OK needed for Emera's construction of the Maritime Link, allowing Muskrat Falls power to be sold to Nova Scotia.

"We're very pleased. It's another step in the process," she told reporters at a press conference at Confederation Building in St. John's, about 1:30 p.m.

"We were confident that we would arrive at this place and it's good to be on the other end of it. There were no surprises here, but we're very happy with today's announcement," she said.

The Maritime Link power line project is a landmark for Newfoundland and Labrador — connecting the island power grid to mainland Nova Scotia.

The link was always spoke of as an add-on to the Nalcor Energy's massive Lower Churchill power project, with the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric facility and a tie-in from Labrador to and across the island, but the Nova Scotia link will now handily give the province a supply of new customers for its renewable power.

The province and Nalcor Energy want to have its hydro facility at Muskrat Falls up and running in 2017, beginning to supply power for Newfoundland and Labrador, but also start the supply of that power for sale.

"This deal works for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with or without Nova Scotia, but we have excess power that we can commercialize and add value to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is what this agreement does and that's a good thing," Dunderdale said.

Mum on financing

In addressing reporters, the premier was joined by both Natural Resources Minister Derrick Dalley and Nalcor Energy president and CEO Ed Martin.

"At this stage, we're not talking about timing (around financing) and where we're headed on the advice of our bankers," Martin said.

As for the potential for increased competition in Nova Scotia, given the Nova Scotia government's new push to allow consumers more choice for power providers, Martin said Nalcor welcomes the competition.

"We're going to be making a good return on that excess (Muskrat Falls) power."

NDP MHA George Murphy took questions after the premier and Martin, and was far less enthusiastic about the advancement of the Maritime Link.

“The province has got itself locked in supplying power to the Nova Scotia government, to Emera,” he said.

“It’s my belief right now that Nova Scotians are going to be seeing some pretty cheap prices for consumers and all of that will be to the detriment of the Newfoundland and Labrador consumer, who will be paying the brunt for this (Lower Churchill) project.”

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(Earlier story)

UPDATE: Reaction rolling in on Maritime Link, N.S. power plans

Announcement comes alongside ruling approving Maritime Link construction

Premier Kathy Dunderdale is meeting with reporters at 1:30 p.m. to discuss the UARB decision. Emera says the approval today from the Nova Scotia Utilities and Review Board (UARB), for its Maritime Link project, confirms Muskrat Falls power through the link as the lowest, long-term cost option for Nova Scotia Power customers.

“The \$1.5 billion investment in the Maritime Link will provide benefits to Nova Scotia customers that significantly exceed the value of the investment over the life of the project,” said Chris Huskison, Emera’s president and CEO, in a statement.

The company is now looking to next steps for the link’s construction and the larger Lower Churchill development with partner Nalcor Energy, including finalizing the federal loan guarantee and, on Dec. 15, an update to be filed with the Nova Scotia regulator on the link.

As Emera and Nalcor continue their work on the \$7.7-billion power megaproject, the Nova Scotia government will be working on its new Electricity Reform Act, the bones of which were revealed this morning, just as the UARB’s Maritime Link decision was posted online.

Welcoming choice

The new power Act is expected to result in Nova Scotians being able to have greater choice in who provides their power, opening the markets so renewable power producers can sell power directly to consumers.

“The opportunity being provided by government is positive for renewable energy firms, like Scotian Windfields, and for all Nova Scotia electricity consumers,” said Dan Roscoe, chief operating officer with Scotian Windfields.

"It will provide an additional market for renewable energy infrastructure investment and allow consumers to choose from whom they purchase electricity."

In comparison, in Newfoundland and Labrador, legislation around the Muskrat Falls project has solidified Nalcor Energy's virtual monopoly as a power producer.

NL Liberal reaction

Liberal leader Dwight Ball has noted news of the new legislation alongside comments on the Maritime Link.

"It's a simple question: Is Nova Scotia better off today with this decision on the Maritime Link than they were when Muskrat Falls was sanctioned last December? The answer is clearly yes," he said, in a statement released this afternoon.

"However, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are worse off because they have assumed even more risks associated with this project."

Ball said the Premier backed this province and its energy corporation into a weak negotiating position in relation to a deal needed to satisfy the UARB, by sanctioning Muskrat Falls and starting construction before the regulator gave its approval for the link in Nova Scotia.

Photo

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"At every step in Nova Scotia they are creating more protection for their ratepayers," he went on to say.

"Today, they even introduced legislation to open the energy market to renewable energy producers, allowing competition and choice for their ratepayers. In our province, the PC Government passed Bill 61 giving Nalcor an energy monopoly for 50 years."

2041

Lawyer Dennis Browne says members of the anti-Muskrat Falls group known as 2041, said group members are still studying the ruling at this point.

"It is clear now that the premature sanctioning of the Muskrat Falls Project last December undermined any capacity Nalcor had to bargain with their Nova Scotia counterparts. Nova Scotia will now receive every possible benefit from the Muskrat Falls project. In the result Nova Scotia ratepayers will pay much less for electricity and this province's ratepayers will pay much more for electricity. And our taxpayers will be paying to build Muskrat Falls to ensure that Nova Scotia gets this cheaper electricity. Its difficult to comprehend how this can be allowed to happen," he said.

A statement from Nalcor Energy and the provincial NDP is expected later this afternoon. The government has also been contacted for comment.

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(Earlier story)

The Grand Riverkeeper's Roberta Frampton Benefiel took part as an intervenor in the original hearings on the Maritime Link project before the Nova Scotia regulator, opposing the project.

She said her group has taken a first look at the ruling, released earlier this morning, that finally gives the go-ahead for construction. Her group is reluctant to make any definitive comment just yet, she said, being keen to hear from the Nova Scotia government.

"Right now it's kind of distressing, but it all depends on the Government of Nova Scotia," she said.

As she was speaking with The Telegram, about 10:20 a.m., that same government was offering a briefing to reporters in Nova Scotia, explaining plans to try and open up the energy market in that province, allowing individual ratepayers to buy power directly from renewable power producers.

See related release [HERE](#).

The UARB website can be accessed by clicking [HERE](#).

"Nova Scotians told us they want greater choice of renewable electricity suppliers and we are acting on this commitment," said Nova Scotia's Energy Minister Andrew Younger, in a statement issued by the government. "This legislation will allow renewable energy providers to sell directly to customers and will help ensure competition. It's a solution that puts Nova Scotians first."

The legislation would allow direct-to-market purchases beginning in 2015. In this province, legislation around the Muskrat Falls project has solidified Nalcor Energy's virtual monopoly as a power producer with private wind and solar producers, for example, only allowed to plug into the grid for sale with the approval of Hydro and government.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has not yet commented on the UARB decision and what, if any effect, the latest move on the markets by the Nova Scotia government might have on the Muskrat Falls project. Messages have also been left with Nalcor Energy seeking comment on the decision from the UARB.

More to come.

(Earlier story)

By The Canadian Press Nova Scotia's energy regulator has approved a revised agreement from energy company Emera to proceed with the \$1.5-billion Maritime Link project. The subsea link would ship hydroelectricity from the Muskrat Falls project from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia's Utility and Review Board tentatively endorsed the Maritime Link earlier this year, but it attached a list of conditions to ensure the project doesn't impose a heavy burden on the province's electricity customers.

The board says a revised deal from Emera satisfies those conditions.

Nova Scotia's consumer and small business advocates said they couldn't support the revised agreement because it isn't in the interests of the province's ratepayers.

Emera and Nalcor Energy, Newfoundland and Labrador's Crown energy company, are aiming to have power flowing from Muskrat Falls in 2017.

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