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NS Public Interest Research Group

Responsible Energy Antigonish

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Submission to the Nova Scotia Law Amendments Committee
Re. Bill 57 -Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act
From the Affordable Energy Coalition
Presented by Brian Gifford, Chair

Introduction

The Affordable Energy Coalition applauds some of the commitments in the draft Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act that are stronger than in earlier laws. We also applaud your attempt to put more of the goals into the Act instead of in regulations.

However, like other Nova Scotians we believe the climate emergency calls for much stronger action if we are to do our fair share in keeping world temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. As we transition to a zero carbon economy, it is also vital that we have clear goals to bring deep energy efficiency and highly efficient electric or zero carbon heating systems to the homes of low and modest income households and people in marginalized communities. We also need clear targets for zero emission transportation accessible and affordable to those households and communities. The transition to zero carbon home heating and transportation has the potential to drastically reduce the scourge of energy poverty in NS and make housing more affordable.

Today we are recommending changes to Bill 57 to include these clear targets for low and modest income households and marginalized community members.

The Affordable Energy Coalition

I am speaking for the Affordable Energy Coalition. Our members work with people whose electricity and heat are threatened by disconnection; we work with low income households who spend more than 6% of income on home energy which they simply can't afford to pay; we work with people who often struggle with impossible choices – should I pay energy bills or pay for other essentials like food and medicine and rent? We have been seeking systemic changes to make energy affordable since the early 2000's– for instance through free energy retrofits provided by the HomeWarming program or low cost energy retrofits for rental properties serving low income tenants through Efficiency Nova Scotia's Affordable Multi-family Housing Program. Many of you will be familiar with the vital help those programs provide to your constituents.

Energy Poverty in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia has one of the highest electricity costs in Canada primarily due to our long reliance on fossil fuels. About 60% of our homes heat with expensive oil. We also have lower household incomes. This combination of high energy costs and low incomes leads to Canada's third highest level of energy poverty – i.e. people spending over 6% of income on home energy. One national study estimates 37% of NS households or about 147,00 households experience energy poverty.¹ Our estimate is lower after excluding higher income households paying over 6% of income on energy and for other reasons, but the number is substantial.

The Challenge and the Promise of the Transition to a Zero Carbon Economy

We must transition to a zero carbon economy. The exciting thing about this transition is that it will lead to lower energy bills for all households – for home heating and for transportation. It will lead to more comfortable, healthier homes. Having high energy poverty in Nova Scotia means that dramatically increased efficiency and switching to highly efficient heat pumps or zero carbon heating will reduce energy poverty here more than almost anywhere else in Canada.

The difficulty for low and modest income households is getting from here to there. The cost of making the transition to zero carbon heating and transportation will stop low income households and marginalized communities from making the transition and from benefitting from lower cost energy **unless governments provides the support required.** The HomeWarming program and Efficiency Nova Scotia's Affordable Multi Family Housing Program are excellent programs designed to provide that kind of support. With this targeted support, low- and modest-income households will have lower energy costs as long as they get the help they need to transition to zero-emission heating and transportation. Targeted support must also extend to supporting those living in rural areas to recognize the value of rural areas can have on environmental sustainability and create actions and goals that are relevant to them. For instance, zero emission transportation looks different in rural areas compared to urban areas.

Bill 57 vs EGSPA

The government said it wanted this bill to continue the good work done by an earlier Progressive Conservative government in 2007's Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA). I have personally praised EGSPA countless times over the years for its specific goals that drove real change implemented by governments of 3 different parties. The PC party has good reason to be proud of this legislation that received unanimous support in the legislature.

Unfortunately Bill 57 doesn't deliver the same kind of clarity as EGSPA did. In EGSPA, there were 21 goals, 75% were about clearly stated targets and all had well defined deadlines with most being within 5 years. Bill 57 has a smaller percent with clearly stated targets and several have no defined deadline.

¹ *Energy Poverty in Canada: a CUSP backgrounder (October 2019) – based on a study by Maryam Rezaie*

[As an aside, I find it confusing determining what elements of EGCCRA are goals and what are not. The government says there are 28 goals. I counted 36 items that seemed to be described as goals. It would help to clarify this.]

Strengthening Bill 57 with ambitious goals for home efficiency

We were looking to Bill 57 to set ambitious goals for requiring home efficiency and electric or zero emission home heating as well as transportation for all households and especially for low and modest income households and for marginalized communities. In clause 7b, Bill 57 mentions these ideas but doesn't set ambitious goals or deadlines. It promises to work on this but doesn't make any real commitments.

Recommendation 1:

Goal 7b: Add clearly defined targets and deadlines for efficiency programs, especially for low and modest income households and marginalized communities

Goal 7b says: "to support, strengthen and set targets for energy efficiency programming while prioritizing equitable access and benefits for low income and marginalized Nova Scotians;"

We recommend that goal 7b be changed to read:

"to strengthen energy efficiency programs so that

- all new public and non-profit homes will be net zero energy ready and have electric or zero carbon heating systems;**
- all existing public and non-profit homes will have deep energy retrofits and electric or zero carbon heating systems by 2030;**
- all homes owned by low and modest income homeowners or rented to low and modest income households, will have deep energy retrofits and electric or zero carbon heating systems installed by 2030 with 50% completed by 2026**
- 2.5% of all existing homes will have net zero energy ready retrofits per year starting no later than 2030; and**
- ownership documentation will not be a barrier to meeting these targets in African Nova Scotian communities"**

Explanation: See above. We are encouraged that this new government is committed to strengthening efficiency programming, especially for low income and marginalized communities. But we are dismayed by the lack of targets in the proposed Act. The revised goal we are recommending will go a long way to eliminating energy poverty while reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions. This must be accomplished through a combination of the programs referred to here and the stronger building codes referred to in Recommendation 2. The 2.5%/year retrofit recommendation is from The International Energy Association.

Recommendation 2:**Goal 7e: Expand building energy standards for all homes**

Goal 7e says: to adopt the 2020 National Energy Code for Buildings within 18 months of it being published by the Government of Canada;

We recommend that goal 7e be changed to read:

“to adopt the 2020 National Energy Code for Buildings and the National Building Code within 18 months of their being published by the Government of Canada and to require all new residential buildings to be net zero energy ready and to have electric or zero carbon heating starting no later than 2025;”

Explanation: National Building Code section 9.36 contains energy efficiency standards for homes and small buildings. The National Energy Code for Buildings applies to other buildings. Adopting the National Building Code rapidly is as important as adopting the National Energy Code for Buildings.

The 2020 national codes include stepped or tiered levels of energy efficiency, rising in several steps to Net Zero Energy Ready as the highest standard. It is essential that Nova Scotia adopt the highest standard, Net Zero Energy Ready. The Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change included a goal for all new buildings to be “net zero energy ready” by 2030 and the International Energy Agency says all new buildings must be “net zero carbon ready” in all countries by 2030 and we must retrofit existing buildings to this standard at 2.5% per year by 2030.² We believe Nova Scotia can and must be a leader in this.

About 26% of Nova Scotia’s GHGs are from residential buildings.³ Efficiency is the best method of reducing GHGs from homes and it also creates local employment and healthier, more comfortable homes. The savings in annual energy costs in Nova Scotia are high enough to pay for the increased costs of construction. The building industry must be transformed to be able to accomplish this, which will help in accomplishing our first recommendation as well.

Recommendation 3: Public zero emission transportation

Goal 7j reads: to develop and implement a zero-emission vehicle mandate that ensures, at a minimum, that 30% of new vehicle sales of all light duty and personal vehicles in the Province will be zero-emission vehicles by 2030;

² Net Zero by 2050 – A Roadmap for the Global Energy Sector – International Energy Association, May 2021 - Pg 148.

³ Canada’s Energy Regulator – NS Profile 2018 - <https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/en/data-analysis/energy-markets/provincial-territorial-energy-profiles/provincial-territorial-energy-profiles-nova-scotia.html>

We recommend that goal 7j be amended to read:

to develop and implement a zero-emission vehicle mandate

- that ensures, at a minimum, that 30% of new vehicle sales of all light duty and personal vehicles in the Province will be zero-emission vehicles by 2030; and
- **that requires all new public transit vehicles and regulated intercity vehicles will be zero emission by 2022.**

Explanation: Transportation uses 43% of end use energy in Nova Scotia and creates 31% of Nova Scotia's GHGs. It is our 2nd largest sector contributing to GHGs. We support the proposal to zero emission vehicle mandate but it is important that public transit leads the way in the transition to zero carbon emissions and that it remain accessible in cost to low and modest income Nova Scotians.⁴

We applaud goal 9b on active transportation as a vital element in making zero-carbon transportation options available to low and modest income and marginalized communities.

Recommendation 4:**Section 8: Add addressing energy poverty to the Climate Action Plan for Clean Growth****Add to Section 8, between c and d:**

- **"c - making net zero energy ready homes and zero carbon heating and transportation affordable to low and modest income and marginalized households" and**
- **change the existing c to d.**

EXPLANATION: This must be a primary focus in the new Climate Plan, to implement goals 7b and 7j as we have re-worded them.

Recommendation 5: Environmental Racism and Equity

Goal 17 currently reads: The Government's goal with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion is to initiate in 2022 ongoing work with racialized and marginalized communities to create a sustained funding opportunity for climate change action and support for community-based solutions and policy engagement.

We recommend changing goal 17 to read:

The Government's goal with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion is to initiate in 2022 ongoing work with racialized and marginalized communities

⁴See footnote 2.

- to create a sustained funding opportunity for climate change action and support for community-based solutions and policy engagement, as part of a commitment of 40% of climate change spending being directed at low and modest income and marginalized communities;
- To measure the health impacts of toxic sites, radon and arsenic on all existing marginalized and low income communities by 2025 and to mitigate them by 2028.

EXPLANATION: California mandates a high percent of its climate funding go to low income communities. Nova Scotia has done well so far in spending funds from the Green Fund created under the Cap and Trade system, but there is no established minimum. We believe this makes sense. Environmental Noxiousness, Racial Inequalities and Community Health Project (ENRICH) as documented the existence of environmental racism in Nova Scotia. It is time to establish a goal to mitigate its effects.

Recommendation 6: Higher, firmer, clearer ambition in our overall goals

Our members are deeply concerned about climate change, just as other Nova Scotians are. We have heard the calls by scientists and seen the unpredictable destructive effects of too little action to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions.

The Affordable Energy Coalition supports the calls by other groups, including some of our members, for higher, clearer ambition in this Act including

- a 58% reduction of GHG's below 2005 levels (6a)
- 90% renewable electricity by 2030 (71);
- no new fossil fuel developments (offshore or onshore oil or gas exploration, development or storage; LNG; or gas generation of electricity);
- a stronger accountability mechanism with annual reporting on progress by an independent agency; and
- changing to earlier deadlines with mandatory measures in other goals.

The proposed act is a welcome improvement compared to recent laws – in particular, creating the goals of 80% renewable electricity and closing coal plants by 2030 and putting the goals into law instead of regulation. But it doesn't meet the requirements of the climate emergency we are facing. We support the statements by the Climate Emergency Unit which you heard earlier today.

CONCLUSION

The Affordable Energy Coalition applauds the government for increasing Nova Scotia's climate ambitions but we urge you to adopt our 6 recommendations in order to fulfill the promise of eliminating energy poverty as part of the necessary transition to a zero carbon economy.

Thank you

Brian Gifford
Chair, Affordable Energy Coalition