

Industry Group Offers Recommendations for Bioenergy Development in PEI

Charlottetown – February 4, 2008 – The Maritime Bioenergy Working Group recently made a submission to the provincial government calling for a series of policy changes to encourage more rapid development of PEI's substantial bioenergy resources. Those resources include low-grade wood, straw and energy crops such as high fibre grasses and crop and animal wastes that can be utilized for the production of heat and power for domestic, commercial and industrial purposes.

The Group is comprised of people in the forest, farm and bio-energy industries from the Maritime Provinces who come together to exchange information and address regional bioenergy development issues. PEI has a number of people actively working in the bioenergy field in burner design, manufacture and sales, the production of woodchips and pellets from wood and agricultural fibres, district heating and consulting. This group works closely with CANBIO – the Canadian Bioenergy Association which is a Canada-wide industry association. The Group holds information workshops to raise awareness and develop policy submissions to provincial and municipal governments.

In its submission to the PEI government, the Group presented 12 recommendations. “We are asking the new Liberal government to develop a positive policy framework to support the development of a growing bioenergy industry that can fully utilize PEI's substantial farm and forest biomass resources,” said Group Chair Bruce McCallum. “This approach has had considerable success in both the high tech and wind energy industries on the Island. We think that a similar approach should be taken to encourage bioenergy development.”

The Group is asking the Province to actively promote the use of solid biofuels - forest chips and farm/forest pellets and straw - to heat government buildings. Bioenergy technologies for domestic and commercial heating are well developed, efficient and clean burning. Woodchips work well in the larger systems and pellets are preferred for smaller installations. “The bioenergy industry urgently needs markets for significant volumes of woodchips, straw and pellets made from forest and farm fibre,” said McCallum. “Switching public buildings to woodchips and pellets will save the Province substantial dollars at today's prices and there will be much greater annual savings in the future.”

The Group also recommends that provincial and federal governments take initiatives to support investments in district heating systems on PEI. “Heating PEI homes, businesses and institutions is going to be a major economic challenge as oil prices continue to escalate,” said McCallum. District heating systems that heat large groups of buildings offer many long-term benefits such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions, lower maintenance and replacement costs for conventional heating systems, direct dollar savings and energy cost stability. But district heating infrastructure is very costly. It needs government support to put the underground piping systems in place. “The Charlottetown district heating system has been very successful. It is a model for North America,” said McCallum. “However, at present, only the largest buildings are on the system. If Charlottetown was a town located in one of the Nordic countries, most of the homes would also be connected to the system, offering homeowners the same benefits as the larger customers.”

The PEI chapter of the Maritime Bioenergy Working Group met recently with Environment, Energy and Forestry Minister George Webster and Community and Cultural Affairs Minister Caroline Bertram to discuss their bioenergy policy submission. “We had a good discussion and we look forward to a positive response to our recommendations in the new PEI energy strategy that is expected soon from government,” said McCallum.

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