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BCSEA has mixed reaction to new hydro projects

The BC Sustainable Energy Association (BCSEA) welcomes the prospect of BC's first commercial wind projects, but vows 'P-4' (prolonged and persistent public protest) against the two coal-fired power projects announced as winners in the Call for Power to supply the BC Hydro grid.

BC Hydro has awarded 38 contracts to independent power producers across BC, including 29 hydro, three wind, two biomass, two waste heat, and two coal/biomass projects.

'We're very pleased to see some robust wind proposals winning contracts,' said Guy Dauncey, BCSEA president, 'Now BC can finally start to catch up with the rest of the world. There is no reason why all BC's electricity needs should not be met with conservation and 100% non-greenhouse gas emitting energies.'

But Dauncey criticized the two coal-fired projects, 'These will be BC's first ever coal-fired power plants. British Columbians are very concerned about climate change and aware that we need to cut greenhouse gas emissions. BC Hydro could cut out the coal and still meet its energy needs. The two coal projects increase BC's emissions of greenhouse gases by 1.6 megatonnes a year, adding to BC's total, as well as pollutants such as mercury, at a time when the Premier has said he wants BC to have the best air quality in the world, and to do better than Oregon in reducing our emissions.'

Tom Hackney, BCSEA policy specialist, noted that traditional cost estimates of power fail to capture the costs of environmental harm from greenhouse gas emissions. 'It's a myth that coal-fired power is cheap,' he said. 'What will happen when we start to regulate greenhouse gas emissions? Will BC Hydro ratepayers have to pay to offset emissions from the coal-fired plants?'

'The public will not react well to this,' he predicted. 'The burning of coal is a primary contributor to global climate change, as well as releasing mercury and other pollutants into the air,' Dauncey said. 'Many people have seen Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*, and there is a deep current of grave concern running through the world about the dangers that global climate change presents.'

'BC Hydro wants the coal-fired power to provide 'firm' power that will run 24 hours a day, at times when the wind is not blowing and the creeks are dry,' Dauncey said. 'But BC already has a very strong firm power capacity in its dams. BC Hydro seems not to have studied the potential for BC to generate power from intermittent sources such as wind and microhydro, and use the province's hydro-electric dams as a battery where excess power can be stored to meet the peak demand, which happens during the winter, when the wind blows the strongest.'

'Regarding the 29 water-based hydro projects, the BC Sustainable Energy Association is fundamentally supportive, provided each project is very carefully assessed for potential impacts on fish habitat and water flows,' Dauncey said.

BC Hydro also granted a contract to a 90MW power project in Gold River, by Green Island Energy, which will burn biomass on the site of the closed-down pulp mill. According to BCSEA, each megawatt will require 20,000 tons of wood waste, so the 90MW project will require almost two million tons of wood waste a year. 'We are very dubious about this project,' comments Dauncey, 'We are very concerned about where the 'biomass' will come from, as there's not enough wood waste on Vancouver Island to feed the plant. Are they going to ship up California's garbage, and burn that?' ☞

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