

Wednesday, June 27, 2018

## **Ecology Action Centre's presentation to the Just Transition Task Force**

### **ABOUT THE ECOLOGY ACTION CENTRE**

Founded in 1971, the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is Atlantic Canada's largest environmental advocacy organization with 6,000 members, 500 volunteers, 45 staff, and seven action areas. Grounded in community, the EAC takes leadership on critical environmental issues from biodiversity protection to climate change to environmental justice. The EAC has been working on issues of coal in Nova Scotia for more than 20 years by regularly advocating for the managed decline of coal electricity generation in Nova Scotia, while also been hosting conversations and building relationships. In recent years, the just transition has been at the forefront of our work as we engage with dozens of stakeholders through the Climate Jobs Roundtables and the campaign to Envision 2030.

### **NOVA SCOTIA'S CONTEXT**

The issue of this transition goes deeper than the 600 coal workers in the thermal plants across Nova Scotia. Our province has a long history with coal mining and coal power generation, and the workers and communities deserve respect for all it has done in our province. However, Nova Scotia has not forgotten the scars left by the coal mining industry. Our experience is that many Nova Scotians and Cape Bretoners know full well that the coal industry is not sustainable, and brings safety and economic risks along with it - but people need work, and are ready to work in coal in order to make a living that supports themselves and their families. As a province that utilizes coal-fired generation for 55% of its electricity needs, the managed decline to a coal-free electricity system will be a necessary but challenging one.

It is also important to recognize the particular circumstances of communities in historic coal areas in Cape Breton and Northern Nova Scotia, and connect the issues of work, poverty and energy poverty. In fact, in 2018, there are homes in Cape Breton that still burn coal as a primary heat source. Families of former coal miners still receive a discount for their coal as part of severance and retirement agreements. For those still using coal for heat, their heating costs are less than ten percent the cost of using home heating oil.

Nova Scotia has a history of our community members travelling "Out West" (ie - to Alberta's Oil Sands) for work. Many individuals temporarily leave their families in Nova Scotia while they fly to and from their job in the Oil Sands to make a living. This culture is damaging to Nova Scotian families, communities and individuals. Many individuals impacted by this lifestyle experience increased mental health and addiction problems as communities become increasingly disconnected and unstable.

Rural towns rely on large companies and their employees for municipal tax income. Municipalities require increased capacity to plan for sustainable long-term development. Most municipal staff people tasked with long-term planning have too many other assigned tasks. The Town of Bridgewater is an excellent example of what a town can accomplish with a staff person dedicated to long-term capacity.

### **PROPOSED SOLUTIONS**

We see a notable overlap in the transition of our electricity system to 100% renewable, and the transition of coal workers in affected communities to low-carbon livelihoods. Importantly, we believe all solutions have to be discussed by and implemented by the affected communities.

- **Municipal staff capacity:** The affected towns and municipalities require funding for full-time permanent staffers to support long-term planning and investments. There are many smart energy community planning examples throughout Atlantic Canada that are closely linked with long-term community and financial planning. This kind of foresight and implementation requires continuity through staff time that will eventually pay for itself through smart planning or plan for obsolescence.
- **Energy efficiency:** With 1,400 Nova Scotians working in energy efficiency, there are already more than double the amount of people employed in this industry than in coal generation. Clean Energy Canada and Efficiency Canada recently released a report from Dunsky Consulting showing that if Nova Scotia invests in energy efficiency as needed to meeting the goals of the Pan Canadian Framework, it would create 4,200 annual jobs. The energy efficiency industry has hundreds of categories of jobs from insulators to roofers to energy engineers.
- **Manufacturing industries and maintenance economy:** Nova Scotia needs to invest in local green manufacturing such a prefabricated wall panels, HVAC systems, windows and doors, and insulation. The maintenance economy will play a key role in the future, as technologies like heat pumps, wall assemblies, air exchanges, and transportation infrastructure will need regular upkeep. This is an important opportunity to consider how rural communities might focus on stable, healthy communities rather than continual growth.
- **Local jobs:** Nova Scotians communities benefit from jobs located in the communities in which they live. This will help to maintain municipal tax income, community resilience and dynamics, and overall well-being of the community members.
- **Solar, wind and sustainable transportation industries:** Due to reduced prices and increased rebates the solar industry is set to triple in three to four years in Nova Scotia. A report from the Green Economy Network predicts that investments into renewable energy and sustainable transportation could create 12,595 jobs and 5,018 jobs respectively by 2030.

## EAC CAN SUPPORT THE JUST TRANSITION

The EAC is very keen to help coach communities in finding and implementing solutions. We recognize that the transition has to come from the workers and the communities and see ourselves as support for whatever initiatives align with the transition to a low-carbon economy. As a charitable organization that relies on funding to direct our work, if the EAC is to provide support to communities it is essential that we obtain funding that supports this work. Some specific examples of how the EAC can provide to support the Just Transition includes:

- Pointing to success stories of smart community planning that already exist in Nova Scotia
- Hosting and providing space for community discussions to follow the Task Force's Town Halls.
- Support communities in developing plans to move off of coal and into a new chapter.
- Continue to advocate for provincial and federal policies that are informed by our experience on the ground.

## CONCLUSION

The EAC is very grateful for the time the Just Transition Task Force has provided us to discuss our perspectives regarding the Just Transition off of coal in Nova Scotia. For more reading to back up our points today, we have are providing several other documents:

1. Bridgewater Community Energy Planning Toolkit
2. Efficiency Canada: Less is More Report
3. Green Economy Network: A Roadmap to Green Jobs in Nova Scotia
4. List of jobs in green economy

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