

## ATTACHMENT A

**Comments/ Feedback from community members at Nov. 23-24,2016 workshop after OEB presentation. Also included are comments re: H1RCI service**

### Group 1 Feedback

- **Drop Standard A rates for remotes:** The current Standard A rate is 97 Cents/kWh for all the Government funded buildings and with grid connection it will drop to 29 Cents/kWh. It was suggested to consider implementing the 29 Cents/kWh now for a smooth transition to grid connections. OEB could help subsidize that.
- **Drop delivery charges:** Delivery charge was for the grid connected communities in the south that they wanted gone. To consider getting rid of monthly charge on bills for the northern First Nations.
- **Subsidies:** To be cautious on the subsidies during discussions with INAC and to ensure that they need to maintain the current Standard A rate subsidy until the grid connection. Funding cannot be reduced or stalled/when they see cost-savings. (When formulas are calculated for operations and maintenance, the Standard A rates are included and built into the subsidy electric component)  
**Other subsidies:** Construction costs for connections (poles etc) are much higher in the North than in the South.
- **Breakdown of the bundle rate:** The true cost of the power for North is to be provided towards customer education. The breakdown will facilitate better understanding of revenue sources, and payments made on specific allocations by home owners. Even though community members pay a subsidized cost, the breakdown could serve the purpose of an educational tool for RRRP and residential rate payers.
- **Customer relations and Customer service:** To enhance, the group suggested to tie into processes and structures through local RRRP workers who are closer to the communities and delivers energy programs. To initiate a customer education process on rates, bills etc, as part of customer education-a community-based approach. The conservation program could also be brought back as a behavioral modification on using less power, on using technologies that reduces consumption, bills. (H1RC have an application-based...appliance program)
- H1RC in partnership with the community could engage with the rate payers on conservation, consumer education programs besides the bill

collections. **More presence:** HORCI and OEB are asked to have more presence in the community.

- **Late payment charge:** 19.5% on an annual basis is too high and the time frame that kicks in is too short with 20 days. To consider with 60 days' time frame and to be tied to borrowing rates/user rate fees and not market-based rates.
- **Application based programs:** Special consideration is to be made for seniors and elders who find it difficult to navigate through the application process. Try to build/tie into some of the activities showed in the bill and maybe make them “automatic” rather than applying for them.
- **Include an “adder” to off-grid renewable projects:** REINDER programs are not enough, there need to be an “adder” to the REINDEER rate, as an incentive. The “adder” should consider the impact of reduction of the standard A rate. The renewable projects could be made more attractive to find capital/funding for the remotes.

#### **Community-specific concerns:**

- KIFN: Senior complexes-individual apartments owned by seniors get Hydro bills but there is no funding for common areas.
- Bearskin: 20% rebate across the board, on everybody's' bills - suggested directing the savings towards employment, childcare, education, lands and resources, restaurant etc.

#### **Group 2- Feedback on the OEB processes**

- **Electricity rate:** Hydro bill are too high. To consider seasonal rates as lot more electricity is used in the winter. Or, people who don't have woodstoves have higher costs, especially for the elders and seniors. There are cases with high bills and no jobs. To consider percentage reduction of energy bills.
- **Subsidies:** All customers are different. Some have trucked water, and require lots of electricity to run pumps, so, it is not one size fits all when considering subsidies.  
**Power, food, health nexus:** Anecdotal references were made to situations when options is not food versus power with both being essential necessities. Junk food is cheaper which leads to health and medical treatment issues that is cost intensive. Profile of a different family sizes can be acquired from community economic development offices to iron out fairness in payments. Single mothers, grandparents

caring for grandchildren, mentally-challenged, and disabled patients who are unable/or shy away from the welfare application process, become dependents on regular families stretching family budgets. There are no resources to bridge the application process.

- **Incentives:** Incentives for reduced energy use.
- **North versus South unfounded perspectives:** Decision-makers from the South have to visit the northern communities to see first-hand, ground realities. The communities in the north have to deal with a lot more situations that the south doesn't face. Also, "Thunder Bay is not north or reflective of the TRUE NORTH". Also, get an understanding of family structures and community way of life.
- **Energy Star Program:** To be made available to everyone and not just for low-income group people. The HIRC program swaps old appliances for Energy Star appliances.

### **Feedback on the HIRC processes**

- **Community relations-**To understand community' expectation on building relations-"HIRC version is different from ours". Mostly council members attend meetings in Thunder Bay and sometimes the information flow is restricted or stalls at that level. Suggestion was made to engage with the communities more through community meetings organized for EVERYONE to attend, open houses, FB, radio etc. Also, forward materials that are easily understood by the community. Sending program promotional/marketing pamphlets with bills doesn't always work.

People who implement programs like OESP and LEAP need to go to communities, help them with the application process.

- **Housing:** Lack of housing leads to overcrowding that lead to high electricity bills. Eg: North Caribou. Also, with large families, it is very easy to go over the first 1000kwh threshold. To consider up to 2000 kwh. before increase.
- **Renewable projects:** Community is interested to invest, own and run more renewable options.
- **Standard A** rate on band council building and assets needs to be lower. Shouldn't have to wait for grid connection to get lower standard "A" rate. Don't want rates to change or access to RRRP to go away when grid comes in. Need more than just the \$20 service charge off and not make it comparable to the delivery charges of the south.
- **Joint process:** Consult with INAC for cost savings on when the grid comes in. And ensuring that any subsidies that come from OEB does not reflect on a reduced cost saving options from INAC.

**Subsidies:** Should not be something we have to apply for.

- **Additional concerns:**

- Lots of power surges with diesel generation or power goes out for a few seconds. Thus, outages should result in lower bills and should be reflected on the bills.
- Sometimes when they come to communities to do the disconnections, they won't take any cash.
- Disconnect charges add an extra burden and are varying from 65\$-165\$ that ensues a long wait to be reconnected once the bill is paid.

### Group 3 Feedback

- **Standard A rate:** There are two rates-one for the First Nations and one for the Municipal. So, the community deals with the individual bills and Municipal/Band type accounts. Rates are high that the Band office have to sometimes pay from other programs. It was suggested that the respective community band offices need to be made aware that with the grid connections, there is a possibility of the reduced/stalling of the INAC funding and subsequent subsidies. This needs clear understanding amongst all of us and we should be on the same page.
- **Understanding realities:** Both, the communities and HIRC want to be treated fairly and so, to approach the system through a holistic lens. There are realities on both sides-to acknowledge and respect. Adding or subtracting services without realizing the ground realities leads to misunderstanding and lack of expectations.
- **Time of Use rates:** Do not want time of use rates as there are unemployed people and energy consumptions to consider. Using the time of use rate will only hurt us.
- **Cost of living:** To take into account the cost of living and all costs including freight as they are significantly higher. Everything costs double in remote Northern Stores even with a subsidized rate.

Need to help seniors and Elders who cannot keep up with the costs of living. Reference was made of the 700+ OESP applications that are stuck in the systems process. This is not acceptable when community members rely on these programs. OEB could address the issue with the Ministry of Finance.

Also single parents, some are too young to apply and get into the system. Grandparents are playing the roles of the parents and have extended responsibilities.

Welfare is \$400/month/person. How much can it be stretched to in a typical size family?

- Need to keep “**entrench**” RRRP and Standard A subsidies on a long-term basis irrespective of change in Governments. To ask the Province to approach INAC.  
Rates cannot go up (increase) with connection to the Provincial grid. If that happens then there is no value in being connected to grid. We cannot burden communities with additional payments-a principal used for guidance with grid connecting.
- **Customer Services:** Place someone in our community that can help with applications/Forms. Also, need help within the communities with arrear management and not just a 1-800 number. To include management of bills.. when trying to decide how to pay all bills-food, fuel or electricity.  
Reliability is a problem ..need someone in the community to keep the lights on. To explore solutions, HIRC need to visit the communities and talk to community members. Or the community can set a program and appoint someone in the community in partnership with HIRC.  
The group stressed on **education and communication**. Reference was made of initiating financial management skills.  
The group echoed that we are “remote” and have unique set of challenges. All FNs cannot be treated the same. Comparisons between the North and South should not be made. Reference was made with Land-Fill sites as an example.
- **Renewable Energy:** Walk hand in hand in renewable projects.
- **Watay Power:** To have discussions on bills and payments post grid connection. It is important to prepare the community.
- **Conservation:** Stressed on HIRC conservation programs, appliances and light bulb replacement etc.
- Payments: Payments upfront
- **Back up generation:** A must for any catastrophe for basic services. No compromise on that. To consider portable units by HIRC. It is not only a back-up system, there are financial implications too.
- Quick response time, especially in the winter-someone on standby 24/7. Faster service.