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Energy
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DECISION AND ORDER

EB-2022-0090

ALECTRA UTILITIES CORPORATION

**Application for Electricity Distribution Licence
Amendment**

BY DELEGATION, BEFORE: Brian Hewson

Vice President,
Consumer Protection & Industry Performance

May 12, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Through this Decision and Order, the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) approves the application filed by Alectra Utilities Corporation (Alectra) on February 2, 2022, for an extension of a temporary exemption from section 5.1.3 (b) of the Distribution System Code (DSC). Alectra's licence (ED-2016-0360) is being amended such that its exemption from compliance with section 5.1.3 (b) of the DSC shall be extended to December 31, 2022 in respect of all of Alectra's rate zones except for the Guelph Rate Zone, for which the extension is granted until July 31, 2023.

This Decision and Order is being issued by the Delegated Authority, without holding a hearing pursuant to section 6(4) of the OEB Act.

BACKGROUND

Section 5.1.3 (b) of the DSC came into force on May 21, 2014. It required distributors to install a Metering Inside Settlement Time (MIST) meter on any existing customer facilities where the customer had a monthly average peak demand during a calendar year of over 50 kW (GS>50 kW customers) by no later than August 21, 2020. Once installed, the distributor would then be required to use the MIST meter data to bill its customers.

On July 23, 2020, the OEB issued a Decision and Order (EB-2020-0187) amending the licences of all electricity distributors to exempt them from having to comply with section 5.1.3 (b) of the DSC until March 31, 2021. In that decision, the OEB acknowledged that the operational challenges related to the COVID-19 emergency could reasonably lead to an unavoidable delay in meeting the August 21, 2020 deadline by many distributors. The OEB also stated that, if any distributor required an extension beyond March 31, 2021, it would need to make a separate application.

On March 24, 2021, Alectra applied for an extension of the temporary exemption from section 5.1.3 (b) of the DSC to December 31, 2021, and for the Guelph Rate Zone to July 30, 2022. Alectra stated that despite its diligent efforts to meet the requirements of section 5.1.3 (b), challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the utility from completion of its MIST meter installations. With respect to the Guelph Rate Zone, Alectra stated that although all MIST meters had been installed in the Guelph Rate Zone, the legacy Customer Information System (CIS) for that rate zone was not capable of using MIST meter data for billing until migration of the Guelph Rate Zone customers onto Alectra's Customer Care & Billing (CC&B) system was completed. On March 31, 2021, the OEB issued a Decision and Order (EB-2021-0123) that granted an extension of the exemption to December 31, 2021, and for the Guelph Rate Zone to July 30, 2022.

APPLICATION

On February 2, 2022, Alectra applied for a further extension of its temporary exemption from section 5.1.3 (b) of the DSC. Alectra seeks a licence amendment that extends the exemption to December 31, 2022 for all rate zones except for the Guelph rate zone, for which it requests an extension until July 31, 2023. Alectra filed additional information in support of the application on March 31, 2022.

Alectra provided detailed information with respect to the current status of its MIST meter conversion program. Among other things, Alectra submits that although, as of December 31, 2021, it had achieved 95% of the required MIST meter field installations across its service territories, it needs to install another 340 meters and it needs to convert to interval billing approximately 3300 GS>50 customers that have MIST meters already installed. Field installations continue to be impacted by suppliers facing ongoing pandemic-related challenges, resulting in delays to delivery schedules, and therefore Alectra's implementation plans; and Alectra's vendors have advised that the materials necessary to complete the remaining meter installations will not be fully available until Q3 2022.

With respect to transitioning its GS>50 customers to interval billing, Alectra states that this complex work includes alignment with meter data management protocols for the accounts within the CC&B system, which is time- and resource-intensive (for example, that the process to align the billing system with the installed infrastructure in the field generally takes several hours per account). While it has tried to prioritize conversion to interval billing, over the course of 2021, it had to allocate significant resources to several other priorities, including but not limited to the administration of customer reclassifications due to demand changes and the administration of the Ontario Electricity Rebate. Alectra states that this conversion will be "priority work" in 2022 and that, in order to expedite this conversion, it has also recently engaged a third-party company that specializes in customer care and billing to assist with completing the billing configuration set-ups.

With respect to the Guelph Rate Zone Alectra submits that there are 452 GS>50 customers with installed MIST meters for whom the time-of-use (TOU) billing option is currently not available. Alectra does not currently provide the aforementioned 452 customers with a TOU billing option due to the inability of the legacy CIS to communicate with the Meter Data Management/Repository (MDM/R)¹. While it had initially expected to complete the migration of Guelph Rate Zone onto its CC&B system

¹ The MDM/R is a central hub, providing a common platform for storing, processing, validating and managing hourly electricity consumption information to support local distribution companies' billing processes.

by July 2022, the work towards this goal has similarly been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and it now expects to complete the migration by July 2023. In the interim, Alectra is developing 'work arounds' to ensure that MIST-enabled billing is available for non-Regulated Price Plan (RPP) customers and that a tiered price billing option is available for RPP customers.

The OEB has been made aware that certain Alectra GS>50 customers are concerned about the delay in switching to TOU billing due to the impact on their electricity costs. Alectra has informed the OEB that it is investigating possible interim solutions to provide TOU billing optionality to GS>50 customers with MIST meters and is committed to prioritize any GS>50 customers who request a change to their billing option.

FINDINGS

The OEB has previously stated the importance of completing the implementation of the MIST metered billing for customers in the GS>50 class. However, the OEB finds that Alectra has reasonably justified its request for an extension of its exemption from section 5.1.3 (b) of the DSC due to the ongoing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the delayed MIST meter deliveries which are outside of Alectra's control. The OEB also accepts Alectra's request for an extended exemption period specific to the GS>50 customers located in the Guelph Rate Zone, due to the delay in transitioning these customers from the legacy CIS to Alectra's CC&B system. The OEB supports and encourages Alectra to develop workarounds to ensure MIST-enabled billing for non-RPP customers. The OEB also encourages and expects Alectra implementing solutions to prioritize implementation of TOU billing for those customers who request a change and encourages the company to make best efforts to address their customers' requests.

The OEB therefore grants the application and approves the requested amendments to Alectra's licence.

IT IS ORDERED THAT:

1. Alectra Utilities Corporation's Electricity Distribution Licence ED-2016-0360, specifically Schedule 3 "List of Code Exemptions", is amended to include an exemption from section 5.1.3 (b) of the Distribution System Code.
2. The exemption referred to in paragraph 1 above shall apply to the licensee's entire distribution service area and expires on December 31, 2022.
3. Notwithstanding paragraph 2 above, the exemption referred to in paragraph 1 above shall apply to customers located in the licensee's Guelph Rate Zone until July 31, 2023.

DATED at Toronto, May 12, 2022

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD

Brian Hewson
Vice President, Consumer Protection & Industry Performance