

Provinces jointly take closer look at tidal power

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By GORDON DELANEY Valley Bureau

HALLS HARBOUR — The world's highest tides are about to become more than just a pretty picture on a postcard.

The Bay of Fundy will soon be the centre of attention for scientists, researchers and power companies with the announcement that a strategic environmental and socioeconomic assessment for tidal power has begun.

The study could eventually lead to a mega-tidal power project.

A technical advisory group has been established to oversee the assessment, said Meinhard Doelle, chairwoman for the Tidal Energy Technical Advisory Group.

"The strategic environmental assessment is a tool to help us identify the most sustainable way to develop tidal energy in Nova Scotia, before decisions have to be made about specific projects," she said in a news release.

"New tidal energy technologies show real promise, especially for application in the Bay of Fundy, which may be the best location in North America for grid-connected tidal power generation.

"However, there are many questions regarding the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the new technologies, and we hope to involve a wide range of individuals and organizations in this process."

The work is being done through Nova Scotia's Offshore Energy and Environmental Research Association and is part of Nova Scotia's \$250,000 commitment to complete an assessment.

Tenders have been issued for the environmental and socioeconomic impact study, on behalf of the Nova Scotia Department of Energy and in collaboration with the New Brunswick government.

"Before anything goes in the water, we need to carefully assess any potential impacts," said Energy Minister Bill Dooks.

Many specialists, groups and communities are expected to be consulted throughout the process, including area fishermen, who say they could lose lucrative lobster and scallop fishing grounds.

Fishermen in Halls Harbour fear they may be chased out of the narrow gap between Cape Split and Parrsboro, known as the Minas Passage. It's the area most likely to be the site for an in-stream demonstration turbine to be installed. If successful, it could eventually be home to as many as 100 tidal power turbines.

The assessment will attempt to determine whether marine renewable energy technologies and specifically tidal in-stream technology can be developed in the Bay of Fundy without significant effects on the marine ecosystem.

It will also examine possible impact on the fisheries and on other marine and coastal resources. And it will look at what contribution tidal power can make to community economic development.

The group will advise the Nova Scotia government on renewable energy technologies and how they should be developed, regulated and managed.

The research association is a not-for-profit group fostering offshore energy and environmental research and development. It works with Acadia, St. Francis Xavier and Cape Breton universities.

New Brunswick has joined with Nova Scotia's tidal energy program to assess the potential effect of the new technology.

"A lot of work needs to be done before demonstration turbines can be put in the water, and New Brunswick is helping us move that work forward," Mr. Dooks said.

New Brunswick Energy Minister Jack Keir called the initiative "an important step forward in developing future tidal projects which could benefit both of our provinces."

Each province is investing up to \$75,000 for the study, which will look at marine-life impacts, energy security, energy cost, greenhouse gas levels, compatibility with other marine activities and economic development.

Research from the U.S.-based Electric Power Research Institute identifies the Bay of Fundy as potentially the best site in North America for large-scale, grid-connected tidal-energy generation.

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