

Report: Tidal power plans must proceed with caution

By JUDY MYRDEN Business Reporter

A consultant's report is recommending a "cautionary and staged approach" to harnessing the Bay of Fundy's immense tidal power to generate electricity.

"Many unknowns exist and it is the recommendation of this study team that a small number of pilot projects proceed with significant monitoring and adaptive management plans," Jacques Whitford, an environmental consulting firm, wrote in an executive summary of the report released Wednesday.

The report was commissioned by the non-profit Offshore Energy Environmental Research Association, and co-funded by the New Brunswick Department of Energy.

The report describes an industry in the early stages and technology that has yet to be proven environmentally.

"Even where field testing has included some degree of environmental-effects monitoring, it is not possible to transfer the limited information so far available on the environmental effects from those test sites to the Bay of Fundy," the report states.

The association is now looking for public feedback on the report, which can be found on the research association's website (www.bayoffundyseas.ca) and clicking on background report: Fundy Tidal Energy SEA, under What's New. The deadline for submissions to the association is Feb. 29.

"Public input throughout the process is vital in order to better understand the issues and challenges before decisions are made on this tidal project," said Joshua Leon, co-chair of an advisory group of the research association.

The association will complete its environmental assessment of tidal energy in the Bay of Fundy this spring.

Recently, the provincial government announced the successful bidders to put pilot tidal power projects in the Bay of Fundy in the spring of 2009.

Nova Scotia Power is teaming up with Ireland's OpenHydro on its turbine project. Minas Basin Pulp and Power Co. of Hantsport is joining with UEK Hydrokinetic of Maryland to provide the test turbines.

The third company to test turbines in the area is Clean Current of British Columbia.

Premier Rodney MacDonald announced the government would provide \$4.7 million in funding, and EnCana Corp. gave an interest-free loan of \$3 million toward the test centre.

The three companies will spend \$10 million to \$15 million to put turbines on the floor of the Bay of Fundy. The companies hope to test the turbines by early 2009 and one day supply power to the provincial electricity grid.