

Turning to tides for power

Fundy energy could light N.S. homes by end of 2011, Dexter says after project funding announced

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The tug boat Atlantic Hemlock tows the barge that lowered a tidal test turbine into the Bay of Fundy just off Parrsboro in 2009. A turbine will be removed this week because two blades are broken. (Eric Wynne / Staff)



Premier Darrell Dexter holds a piece of cable similar to the ones that will soon be on the ocean floor collecting tidal power from the Bay of Fundy. Looking on are Cumberland-Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley MP Scott Armstrong, Central Nova MP Peter MacKay and Paul Kravis, vice-president of Internati

PARRSBORO — Premier Darrell Dexter believes energy from tidal power could be flowing into Nova Scotia homes as early as the end of next year.

Dexter made the comment Sunday after a news conference to announce \$20 million in funding from the federal government for a tidal project in the Bay of Fundy and the purchase of four subsea cables.

"As soon as that technology is in the water and as soon as it's generating electricity, it will literally go right into the grid," said Dexter. "It's in the best interest of all the proponents to get their technology in the water as soon as possible and I'm told by the proponents that they feel that this is a realistic expectation."

The Fundy Ocean Research Centre for Energy, a non-profit institute receiving government and corporate funding, signed an \$11-million contract for the production and installation of four subsea cables for the Minas Passage test site. The cables will connect tidal devices to the power grid and allow for the collection of real-time data.

IT International Telecom Inc., which won the contract, will complete about half of the work at its marine terminal in Halifax Harbour, creating about 100 jobs. The combined length of the cables is 11 kilometres and it is expected that they will be installed by next summer.

Paul Kravis, IT International Telecom's vice-president, said the company is proud to be able to lay a green footprint in its own province.

"This is a great chance for our Nova Scotia-based employees to bring their skills and expertise to work right here in Nova Scotia. For us, this is more than a local contract; it's a world-class project."

The Parrsboro location, which overlooks the Bay of Fundy, will be home to research labs, a community room and tidal energy-related educational tools.

Although Sunday's announcement was good news, the project has not been without its challenges.

An experimental turbine is scheduled to be removed from the test site sometime this week because of two broken blades. Nova Scotia Power lost contact with the turbine just seven days after it was launched last spring. The turbine had wireless sensors that were to collect data about environmental impacts and potential electrical production.

Dexter said this remains a research project and such challenges will continue to be addressed moving forward.

"These technologies are, by their very nature, experimental. They are going to continue to experiment with various kinds of technology in order to find the very best (and) in order to make this commercially viable."

The province has started a consultation process to help create legislation for renewable marine resources before considering larger developments and to ensure such projects don't interfere with the fishery or environment in general.

Power rates in the province continue to rise due to increases in the price of carbon-based fuels. The development of renewable resources such as tidal and wind power should ultimately help reduce electricity rates, said Dexter, although he admitted it will take time.

"They're not short-term projects; they're long-term projects. They mean that you are able to wean yourself off of your dependence on carbon-based fuels and give you a reliable fuel source for many years to come."

Dexter said part of changing the way people use energy in Nova Scotia includes partnering with other provinces, whether it is Newfoundland and Labrador with its Lower Churchill project or other provinces with which energy projects can be shared.

"There is a great opportunity for us to rewrite the entire energy standard, the entire energy equation, for this region."

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