

Ministry of Energy

Office of the Minister

4th Floor, Hearst Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto ON M7A 2E1
Tel.: 416-327-6758
Fax: 416-327-6754

Ministère de l'Énergie

Bureau du ministre

4^e étage, édifice Hearst
900, rue Bay
Toronto ON M7A 2E1
Tél. : 416 327-6758
Téléc. : 416 327-6754



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April 24, 2018

Chief Andrew Solomon
Fort Albany First Nation
PO Box 1
Fort Albany ON P0L 1H0

Dear Chief Solomon:

Thank you for your letter of December 8, 2017, and for bringing to my attention Fort Albany First Nation's challenges in notarizing documentation for your microFIT application. The Premier has shared with me your correspondence to her as well. I appreciate you sharing your concerns and I apologize for the delay in my response.

First, I would like to applaud you and your community's leadership in the energy sector and on your notable accomplishments in creating a more sustainable future through First Nations Energy Inc.'s Conservation on the Coast programs. Indigenous communities are showing leadership in Ontario's energy sector with an unprecedented level of involvement.

Ontario's 2013 Long-Term Energy Plan recognized the success that the province's FIT and microFIT initiatives had seen in bringing on new renewable energy supply, and with this success committed to examining the transition of the microFIT program to an enhanced net metering framework. In support of this transition, and recognizing the need for a clean, reliable and affordable energy future, the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) was directed, on April 5, 2016, to stop accepting applications under the microFIT program by December 31, 2017. This direction also set the 2017 Annual Procurement Target for the microFIT program at 50 megawatts (MW). This meant that once the target of 50 MW was reached, the program would be closed.

The IESO provided regular updates on their website and email alerts to subscribers of the microFIT Program distribution list to share the progress towards reaching its 50 MW procurement target. By December 1, 2017, the microFIT Program had reached the target and the IESO stopped accepting any further applications as you are aware.

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I am very sorry to hear that Fort Albany was unable to access the microFIT program before it concluded. The ministry relies on the IESO to administer the microFIT Program, including decisions regarding eligible applications. I understand that Peter Gregg, the President and CEO of the IESO has written to you regarding the standard application of microFIT rules that apply to every applicant, in order to ensure an open and transparent process and fairness for ratepayers across Ontario.

In regards to your request of myself and the Premier, while I understand your frustration, directing the IESO on specific contractual matters would be breaking our commitment to non-interference.

In your December 8th, 2017 letter, you outlined the challenge and expense that requiring a notary for the microFIT application posed for your community, as a First Nation in a remote northern location. Again, I can appreciate your frustration, but would like to highlight that such requirements were ultimately built into the microFIT procurement initiative to provide applicants with protections from potential undesirable business practices, such as misrepresentation.

Commented [AG1]: Fort Albany is not what we describe as remote FN in regards to the electricity system as they are connected to Five Nations system; but they are geographically remote

More broadly, however, we have taken note of the capacity challenges faced by Indigenous communities in accessing energy programs. Through meeting and talking with many First Nation communities and leaders over the past two years, the IESO has identified barriers in its program application processes, and is committed to reducing those barriers going forward. As part of the IESO's implementation work for Ontario's 2017 Long-Term Energy Plan, the IESO is in the process of evolving its Indigenous support programs and will be acting on the feedback received to improve program accessibility and availability.

At our meeting in October 2017, you highlighted to me your interest in bringing into reality the ideas in your community's energy plan and avoiding future investments in diesel back-up solutions. Our government and ministry want to support Fort Albany to accomplish those goals.

While a microFIT contract is not possible at this time, there are other upcoming funding opportunities that could offer support for renewable energy projects in your community. As noted above, the IESO is evolving its Indigenous programs to better align with community needs and opportunities, and when re-launched, will include funding to support the implementation of community energy plans and other community-directed energy initiatives.

Please know that the government and ministry are aware of the challenges your community faces and take them seriously. We want to continue working closely with you and with our counterparts at other ministries and agencies to create meaningful opportunities and benefits for Fort Albany.

In your December 8, 2017 letter, you suggest a meeting as a productive next step. I agree with you on this constructive path forward, and suggest Fort Albany First Nation, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and the IESO participate in such a meeting. To schedule the first meeting according to your availability, I ask you to work through my Senior Policy Advisor, Meaghan Coker, at Meaghan.Coker@ontario.ca or (416) 327-3373.

I hope that you are open to continuing our work together.

Thank you again and please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

Glenn Thibeault
Minister

c: Suggested CC's
Kathleen Wynne, Premier
Chris Ballard, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Daria Babaie, Vice President, Audit and Regulatory, AllenVision
Meaghan Coker, Senior Policy Advisor (Indigenous Engagement and Renewable Energy), Minister's Office
Peter Gregg, President and Chief Executive, IESO
Tabatha Bull, Senior Manager, First Nation and Métis Relations, IESO
Michael Classens, Supervisor, Energy Support Programs, IESO