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British Columbia
Utilities Commission

Letter of Comment

In accordance with the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, to submit a letter of comment concerning an application currently before the Commission, please provide a completed form to commission.secretary@bcuc.com. If email is unavailable, please mail the form to the address above. By doing so, you acknowledge that all letters of comment are published with the author's name as part of the public evidentiary record, both in print copy and on the Commission's website. All personal contact information provided on this page is removed before posting to the website. Forms must be received by the Commission by the last filing date included in the proceeding's regulatory timetable before final arguments.

Proceeding name

Are you currently registered as an intervener or interested party?

Name (first and last)

City

Province

Email

Phone number

Letter of Comment

Name (first and last)

Stu Downey

Date:

17-Aug-16

Comment: Please specify the reasons for your interest in the proceeding, your views concerning the proceeding, any relevant information that supports or explains your views, the conclusion you support and any recommendations. The Commission may disallow comments that do not comply with the Rules of Practice and Procedure.

These comments are provided by Thetis Island Residents and Ratepayers Association on behalf of Thetis Island residents. Our island of approximately 370 residents is located off the east side of Vancouver Island accessed by BC Ferries from the town of Chemainus. Even though we are only a 30 minute ferry ride from Vancouver Island, we do not have access to natural gas.

The primary heating source for the majority of Thetis Island homes is electricity. Secondary heating is often provided by wood heat. Residents of the island, encouraged by the Cowichan Valley Regional District, would prefer to reduce the amount of burning wood to support a cleaner environment.

With the current cost of Tier 2, a large number of island residents heat with wood to avoid being billed at this higher rate, and of course to provide needed heat during cold weather power outages. Any increase to the Residential Inclining Block (RIB) or Conservation Rate as it is described, will only increase the amount of wood burned with a resulting increase in air pollution.

Fortis Gas customers on Vancouver Island, Sunshine Coast and Powell River have recently received a lower rate which now aligns with other areas of BC. A similar 'levelling of the playing field' is not available to Thetis Island residents and we continue to face increasing hardship with increases to BC Hydro bills. Also, with the uncertainty of exactly when Time of Use (TOU) billing is to be implemented, today's concerns regarding RIB may be quite minuscule compared to the issue of being encouraged to only use electric heat during off peak hours. Not the best option for our many seniors and young families during winter months.

In the 1980s, BC Hydro introduced E+ Dual Fuel Interruptible Service (Rate 1105) to provide lower electric heating costs for areas not served by natural gas. The primary target area was Vancouver Island after a failed attempt to initially bring natural gas to the island. This program is now a closed rate. Under the program, BC Hydro customers had to spend hundreds to thousands of dollars to qualify for the rate, simply to receive a reduced rate for heating with electricity. A cumbersome initiative that placed unnecessary burden on the customer.

We support BC Hydro in its conservation efforts and its actions to assist low income customers. Thetis Island Residents and Ratepayers Association would recommend that the BCUC explore the option of increasing the Tier 1 Kwh threshold and thus create a new rate structure for customers who have electric heat but do not have access to natural gas. The result would hopefully enable BC Hydro bills for these customers to be more inline with natural gas heating bills while still promoting conservation, avoiding costly alterations similar to E+ installations, and also to support an overall reduction in wood burning heat sources.