

---

**From:** Penny and Rodney Polden <penrod@saltspring.com>  
**Sent:** February-08-14 5:03 AM  
**To:** Commission Secretary BCUC:EX; david@legalmind.ca; wjandrews@shaw.ca; d b; barkerbrenton@gmail.com; tbraithwaite@bcpiac.com; support@bcpiac.com; kim-mortgages@eastlink.ca; debruijn@shaw.ca; d\_sculpts@shaw.ca; BC Hydro Regulatory Group; thackney@shaw.ca; bharper@econalysis.ca; John Hurd; c6934@telus.net; PHL222@telus.net; Barb & John Mansell; marchantp@shaw.ca; bobmck@shaw.ca; roger.middleton@telus.net; penrod@saltspring.com; jaynepriest@gmail.com; epritchard@bcpiac.com; john@vaseguy.com; tvanswieten@metchosin.ca; norm.r@sios.ca; tps.x@telus.net; ashadra@telus.net; jskogsta@telus.net; vasana@camelot-connection.com; camelot@islandnet.com; info@blueharvestfarm.com; tystanley777@yahoo.com; eliteservice@shaw.ca; rwarder@telus.net; cweafer@owenbird.com; fredweislaw@gmail.com; steven.wishart@gmail.com; david.jae.wong@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Intervenor submission re Meter Choices Program

Rodney Polden

Intervenor Final Submission - BC Hydro Meter Choices program Feb.  
7 2014

-----

There are so many questions that remain entirely unanswered after months of carefully and moderately expressed information requests, that an impartial observer might conclude that the decision makers of BC Hydro would prefer to be simply immune to any meaningful oversight of their actions. In view of that situation that has arisen, perhaps the following comments, respectfully submitted to the Panel, can be regarded as a reasonable remonstrance on the part of one voice among a great many that have written to express their sense of profound unease and concern at what is underway on the part of our public utility.

One question after another has been either brushed off with a spurious answer that did not address the question asked, or it has been pretended that a previous answer to a previous question somehow was also an adequate response to the actual question asked. In many further cases, BC Hydro has claimed ignorance of the practices of other utilities, other drivers, other jurisdictions. It has claimed that many relevant questions that have been posed universally fall outside of what it is able to answer, for so many different causes from confidentiality of commercial contract arrangements, to confidentiality of the Cabinet, to having no reliable information available, to "choosing" not to obtain requested factual material, to baldly stating "BCH will not be doing so-and-so...", even that (in essence): 'it will be more convenient for us not to provide that information'. The stalling, stone-walling and obfuscation has obviously achieved much of what was intended, seemingly.

For, apparently, after all these thousands of words, thousands of pages of material, thousands of letters written pointing out the glaring holes of logic, process, decency, accountability and reasonableness; and additionally of the harm that will be caused to health, to privacy, to accuracy of metering, to economic efficiency, to safety, to democracy, by this process of force-feeding a questionable technology down the throats of a largely unwilling populace, where have we

arrived at? Remarkably, as if there were nothing to be learned from all this expressed concern and expended energy, it seems that the "elephant in the room" may still not be acknowledged.

As best as can be discerned, the BCUC has rarely if ever received so great a number of submissions from the public, almost without exception unequivocally opposed to what is being imposed upon them. This situation it seems is unique. That fact alone demands a recognition that this is no ordinary run-of-the-mill, dollars and cents challenge that has been placed at the doorstep of the Commission - rather it goes to the heart of the question of whether the Commission will find itself able to step up to fulfil its appointed obligation not solely in a narrowly prescribed legalistic sense, but rather in the spirit and the intent of the legislation that enabled and empowered it: with a mandate to balance and offset the power and influence of a giant corporate entity, a monopoly utility that is for most customers without option or alternative, driven and directed by a government willing to use its position to sidestep any closer examination of the ramifications of their current pet project. The willingness has clearly been shown, to try to shut down even the regulator, from being able to effectively regulate.

There are significant issues that presently face the BCUC, because a fair and reasonable handling of the central questions is **required** by the public of British Columbia, these many thousands of customers who are watching the current proceedings to see whether fairness and reasonableness will figure in the way that their actual clearly-expressed choices and priorities are responded to, by the regulators charged with ensuring fairness and reason in the system. If ever a circumstance were to arrive in which the BCUC were unwilling to deliver a judgement that the mandate of "fairness and reasonableness" required in a clear and logical fashion, then there really would emerge a very considerable problem for the people of this province. As has been expressed on so many sides, the vital function that BCUC performs cannot be permitted to decay into a rubber-stamping of edicts delivered from discussions behind closed doors, without oversight, without balance, without public discussion, without input from an informed electorate and an effective political opposition.

Yet there remains the Direction, and the requirement by this government that in fact nothing else must even be discussed, let alone decided upon by BCUC, save for the solitary question of "a small amount of money, or a larger amount of money". Everything else is supposedly off the table for discussion. Yet quite obviously, it is not. There still remain those tricky and uncomfortable issues that can only with courage and genuine independence be addressed within the constraints of Direction No. 4 -- issues, namely, that require of BCUC a decision that is truly and meaningfully both "Fair" and "Reasonable", and that would be judged by any arm's length observer as diligently adhering to those two entirely non-trivial concepts.

Can it really be that BC Hydro has actually acquired the power to force microwave transmitters into every residential and business property in the province, whether the owner of that property agrees or not? Can it really be that a set of actions so closely approximating to the dictionary definitions of "bullying", "cajolery", "coercion" and "extortion" as has been charged by the thousands of customers who have been exposed to the behaviours, will now simply be normalized as "how BC Hydro conducts its business"? Further, that installers who lie, deceive, mislead, pressure and coerce, are all justified in their behaviour because after all, the only thing that actually matters here is that BC Hydro gets its way? When did this kind of treatment become acceptable in British Columbia? Is it the intention of all parties involved in this process to simply wash their hands of any responsibility for what has been going on? We can all find examples in history of governments that just said "Do as we tell you". And we know full well that in due course, Justice stepped in to say to those same government functionaries "Being ordered to do something that may cause harm to a person, is not sufficient excuse for an individual to be innocent of causing harm. 'I was just following orders' will still get you hanged". This issue of smart meters and the need for a program that provides an opt-out (solely) for those who were able to protect their analogue meter, has at its core the certain knowledge

by a great many of us that there is indeed harm that is being caused. That harm cannot be simply rationalised away, merely because it proves inconvenient to a set of profit projections.

A new sense of balance and fairness is called for at this point, a willingness to recognize that the accounting that BCH has so far brought to the table is fundamentally skewed out of all conscionable recognition. BCH can superficially make their figures add up, but they fail massively in making their logic add up. That fact stands out a mile to anyone who reads the material.

Why, one might ask, does every suggestion (such as an already existing self-read program) that would reduce the total costs for those in the Meter Choices Program seem to be impossible, according to BC Hydro, for them to include in the program? Meanwhile every conceivable item that would needlessly pad and inflate the costs for Meter Choice Program participants is presented as being both essential and unavoidable by BC Hydro (from unwarranted ExpressPost to absurdly excessive numbers of theft-prevention devices). It seems that even the Minister responsible, Bill Bennett, recognized with sufficient foresight the likelihood of BC Hydro attempting these actions, to cause him to bring it to the attention of the public. Will we see BCUC make a sincere and motivated attempt to separate the actual and minimal true costs of the program from the frankly laughable lists of expenses that BC Hydro would have us believe "have" to be covered? Many customers (and even present meter-readers etc) have provided details showing that the costs are realistically in terms of cents, not dollars. This disparity cannot be permitted to just float past the Commission unchallenged and uncorrected.

The utility insists that it has to read every meter not less than every two months. So why are we hearing from one customer after another that it has routinely been **many** months since anyone read their meter? BCH insists that a self-read program would not reduce costs and would not be accurate, not reliable, not manageable. Yet every time that I and a great many other BC Hydro customers report our current meter readings to BCH's customer service reps, they seem to have no problem with accepting them and acting on them. This is, after all, not a notional, "proposed" idea for meter reading - for a sizable number of customers this is how their meter routinely **has** been read, in some cases for years and years.

After receiving a bill some time ago that had Hydro's estimates (due to them not reading meters) showing an amount so absurdly inflated beyond what the meter itself was indicating, my subsequent phoned-in self-reads led to BC Hydro's next bill reducing the amount charged by a factor so great that even after consuming an extra two months of electricity, there was **still** a credit amount showing. How can the utility get away with persuading anyone that their methods work and are reliable, when the entire BC Hydro billing system is so obviously in sporadic disarray? Even the online accounts system is currently disabled, it is reported. To claim that the system BCH is proposing for us all is reliable and necessary is simply and undeniably NOT supported by the facts, as attested to by the reported experiences of hundreds of BC Hydro's customers.

Previously, these systems worked with such a high degree of efficiency that they were either a) treated as any other commercial enterprise does, as a normal business expense, not separately charged, or b) covered by a small (**small!**) charge on the regular bill. If a supposedly **more** efficient system cannot absorb even the costs that were previously dealt with in a routine fashion, then where are the much-touted and apparently invisible advantages, and why do they nevertheless add up to steeper increases in rates forecast, than we have seen for many years? These are such obvious questions, are they not?

For a great many Hydro customers, the answers are not to be found in heaping additional financial burden on those segments of the BCH customer base who are already coping with health problems

from the technology. Yet that is exactly what BCH's proposals demand. A realistic and grounded assessment would see BCUC set the monthly fee for retaining an analogue meter at the absolute minimum level that is still permissible by Direction No. 4. Since that is the range of movement to which the Commission has been restrained, and the justifications for a modest fee are both many and indisputable, would that not be as reasonable a course of action as any other? What else is it within the power of the Commission and the scope of Direction No 4 to enact in its decision, that will respond in any meaningful way to the widespread sense of resolute and aggrieved injustice in those 20,000 analogue meter hold-outs and the more than a thousand Letters of Complaint/Comment arising from the behaviours, actions and coercion of the utility? If other remedies there be in addition to the most modest of MCP charges, then please, we urge you sincerely to make use of them also.

In the fields of anthropology and animal behaviour, it is recognised that both humans and animals have the innate and largely unconscious ability developed over millions of years of evolution, known as Motive Discernment, to tell what the intended outcomes are for another creature, of its current course of actions. This hard-won ability enables both people and animals to see through subterfuge and dissembling and to discern the motivations behind the behaviours of others with an extraordinary degree of accuracy. From the many hundreds of Letters of Comment, it is evident that the motivations of BCH have been very clearly discerned through the unfolding actions of the utility. In almost every Letter of Comment where such matters were addressed at all, the supposed denial by BCH that it and its agents were attempting to coerce and persuade, cajole, bully and threaten their way towards the extirpation of the analogue meters was very clear to almost all the respondents. We have seen the same standards of opacity and 'economical' relationship with what was sought through much of the IR process also. Why should it be that customers will end up paying not only increased (and in some cases very steeply increased) charges that are billed to them, but that they should also have to end up with such a bitter taste in the mouth from their closer-than-accustomed view of how they are treated by a monopoly utility?

The cynical exercise of power that has been demonstrated in the course of the smart meter debacle deserves to receive a much more realistic assessment than it has been accorded to date, and some house cleaning is sought by the many thousands of dissatisfied BC citizens who expect, and deserve, better treatment from their public utility. The present proceedings before the Panel may not permit a re-evaluation of that kind, but the necessary re-evaluation will inevitably occur, one way or another.

What is clearly still within the range of possible decisions by BCUC however, is that BC Hydro be required to communicate once again with all those customers who are eligible for the Meter Choices Program, with a view to informing them accurately of the choice available to those who wish to retain an analogue meter, or a radio-off meter, with minimal charges that are truly justified without any padding, inflation and manipulation, and without expecting the customer to underwrite both the Meter Choice Program costs and the additional costs of the Smart Meter Program. Once the realistic total number of participants in such a choice is known, then the Commission will be able to fairly and reasonably make decision as to the appropriate fees charged for each choice. For this process to be a meaningful option for customers, there must of course be a sufficient inventory of analogue meters available, and to this end, I sincerely urge the Commission to direct BCH to cease disposal of the approximately 48,000 analogue meters recently recovered or to be recovered. If this is not achievable for whatever reason, then without question the customer should be permitted to purchase, and have installed by a licensed electrician, their own analogue meter with appropriate seal and whatever other measures are considered advisable by the Commission, to be owned by the customer and maintained or replaced as necessary.

There will have been very little actual utility achieved by all these lengthy proceedings, for the many customers experiencing electrohypersensitivity, tumour recurrence, sleep disturbances and arrhythmias among other medical conditions, if it should turn out that within a year or two, any "opt-out" or "choice" has proved entirely transitory and illusory, due to the availability of a replacement meter having been artificially denied to the customer by the prior actions of BCH. What kind of a "choice" is this all about, otherwise? Surely a better and more genuine outcome than that, is within the range of what is possible for BCUC to achieve.

In a recent book about emerging technologies by one prominent British Columbian, who holds both the Order of Canada, and the Order of British Columbia, I read the following sentence:

"In my home province of British Columbia, the provincial hydro utility has trampled on people's right to decide whether radio frequency radiation might enter their home. I'm one of thousands who refuse the anti-democratic privacy intrusion and related health risks of a wireless device for hydro meter reading."

Hopefully, once the Commission has reached a decision on this matter that is both fair and reasonable, that author will soon be able to write another, much more appreciative and hopeful sentence about the state of our public utility. It is certainly time that change came about.

All of which is respectfully submitted to the Panel

R.Polden

February 7th 2014