

January 2025

Ministry of Energy and Electrification
77 Grenville Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2C1

Consultation to support the important role for natural gas in Ontario's energy system and economy.

The Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce represents nearly 800 Member companies with over 20,000 employees in the Thunder Bay area.

We support the government's position that the Ontario Energy Board must ensure a rational expansion of the natural gas system to support housing and economic growth. This is particularly important in areas where limited electricity supply is needed to support the expansion of industrial facilities that provide both direct and indirect jobs for our communities. We also support and value the regional perspectives put forward by the Northwest Energy Task Force and the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association as part of this consultation process.

It is essential that the Ontario Energy Board ensures that energy remains affordable and reliable while advancing the transition to lower emissions. This is best achieved by permitting a balanced mix of energy options that include natural gas and supports the implementation of clean fuels including renewable natural gas such as biogas from biomass.

What principles should the government provide to the OEB to help inform the Board's ongoing development of natural gas connection policies?

Policies and principles must be adopted that ensure that the energy needs of all households and businesses can be met in alignment with their budgets and timelines. It is essential that OEB policies do not obstruct economic growth, especially in Northern and rural areas of the province that have experienced limited economic growth over the past 20+ years.

What role should natural gas play in supporting economic development in Ontario's industrial and agricultural sectors, including those processes that may be difficult to electrify?

Natural gas must continue to play a balanced role in economic development for industrial and agricultural operations. Electricity capacity is a concern in Northern Ontario and natural gas offers an affordable and efficient alternative. This is particularly important in communities that are located along the Trans Canada pipeline and those with a major connecting line with available capacity that can be utilized to attract new industries that require the gas for their process or to efficiently heat large buildings.

What are the challenges and opportunities for enhanced energy efficiency, adoption of clean fuels (e.g., RNG, Hydrogen) and emission reduction methods (e.g., carbon capture and storage) to lower emissions in the natural gas system?

People living in the Boreal Forest region know there's a viable source of energy that produces green renewable energy and creates good paying long-term jobs in the smaller communities of the province. It's forest biomass; consisting largely of the left-over wood from logging and sawmill operations.

Almost every community in Ontario's north is surrounded by the forest industry, making wood fiber a readily available resource. Today only 46% of the province's total allowable cut is being harvested each year, less than 0.5% of Ontario's overall public forest.

One advantage of using forest biomass to produce biogas is the positive contribution it makes to combating climate change. Canada's Boreal Forest absorbs and stores extremely significant amounts of carbon dioxide. While new growth continuously draws carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, older forests eventually start emitting it. Utilizing wood fibre that can't be used for traditional forest products to fuel biogas production facilities makes both environmental and economic sense. The output can be used locally to reduce the amount of western Canada natural gas being shipped to southern Ontario. Such a series of projects will create significant employment in the Northwest and enhance the economic condition of the host communities. Government investments in these projects are essential to achieving environmental targets and ensuring the continued success of the forest industry.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Charla Robinson
President
Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce