

February 7, 2026

To: The Honourable Susan Holt, Premier, Chair of the Executive Council and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Chancery Place P.O. Box 6000 Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 5H1

Re: Scientific opposition to the construction of a shale gas power plant in New Brunswick

Madam Premier,

As members of New Brunswick's academic scientific community from a variety of disciplines, we are writing to express our deep concern and opposition to the proposed construction of a shale gas power plant in our province. Given our scientific expertise, we stand in solidarity with the citizen movement in Tantramar and surrounding communities.

At a time when the climate emergency demands a transition to carbon-free energy sources, when proven and affordable options exist to meet this demand, and when the citizens of this province can no longer afford another increase in the cost of living, **this project appears to be scientifically, environmentally and economically nonsensical.**

1. Choosing renewable energy : wind turbines, solar power and battery systems

The global energy landscape has changed radically. According to the International Energy Agency, renewable energy now accounts for almost all new electricity generation projects worldwide [1]. Canada, including all of the Atlantic provinces, has committed to this path. **Building a shale gas power plant today is in stark contrast to global energy trajectories and New Brunswick's climate commitments [2].**

NB Power and your government claim that a new shale gas power plant is needed to increase electricity generation capacity while ensuring the stability of the electricity grid. This is not the case: it is now possible to build battery systems to meet peak demand at a much lower cost [3, 4, 5, 6]. In addition, renewable energy projects come online much more quickly, in six to eighteen months in the case of solar power plants, for example [7]. They are also much less likely to exceed their budgets: 14% of gas-fired power plant projects exceed their projected costs by more than 50%, reaching on average double the initial cost, compared to 7% for wind power and only 2% for solar power [8]. Thus, **on purely economic grounds, the choice of renewable energies is obvious**. New Brunswick must look to the future rather than locking itself into a costly technology that is destined to disappear.

2. Choosing demand management strategies

Another clear observation is that consuming less electricity costs much less than increasing production capacity. In this regard, **peak demand can be reduced more cheaply through passive and active demand management programmes**, which are currently underdeveloped in New Brunswick. Enhanced programmes for the installation of heat pumps, geothermal pumps and building insulation, similar to those implemented in Massachusetts, could reduce total demand by up to 400 MW by 2030 [9]. NB Power could also improve its operations by focusing more on active demand management strategies, including time-of-use pricing programs, thermal storage, and the installation of 'smart' thermostats. Such strategies could reduce peak demand by an

additional 85 to 195 MW in 2030 [9, 10], according to analysis commissioned by NB Power itself [11].

3. No to an American gas plant in New Brunswick

Gas as an energy source carries a high risk, both economically and geopolitically. First, the current context requires us to reduce our dependence on the United States in all areas. Yet, ProEnergy, the project developer, is based in the state of Missouri, and the gas used by the plant will come mainly from the Marcellus and Utica shales in the United States, as is the case with the gas consumed in New Brunswick today [15, 16, 17]. The plant's operations, including starting and stopping production as needed, would be managed from ProEnergy's Missouri management centre. In addition to the financial uncertainty surrounding potential tariffs, **the proposed plant would be directly dependent on the United States for its construction, fuel and operations management.**

Second, this energy source exposes our province to significant fluctuations in global gas prices [12]. What's more, some analysts foresee a peak in shale gas production in North America, leading to continued price increases in the medium to long term [13, 14]. On the contrary, we believe that **energy security begins with the implementation of energy efficiency and renewable energy systems right here in N.B.**

4. No to more greenhouse gas emissions

Our province has adopted robust legislative tools to address the climate crisis, including the 2022-2027 Provincial Action Plan, which promises a 46.8% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from 2005 levels by 2030 [2], or 1,700,000 tonnes less than in 2020. The proposed gas-fired power plant ignores both the spirit and letter of this target: the plant will emit an additional 900,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases [18], more than 50% of the target and over 7% of current provincial emissions. To meet the 2030 target, other sectors in the province would be required to make additional reductions equivalent to this quantity, which unrealistically shifts the burden to hard to decarbonize non-fossil fuel sectors. While the Action Plan calls for a complete phase-out of coal by 2030, **replacing one fossil fuel with another shifts the problem rather than achieving the promised energy transition.**

That's not all: methane, the main component of so-called 'natural' gas, warms the atmosphere 82 times more than carbon dioxide (CO₂) over 20 years [19]. Since it is an odourless and colourless gas, leaks that occur throughout the production and distribution chain are often undetectable. Taking these so-called 'fugitive' emissions into account, some analyses estimate that **a new gas-fired power plant might be as harmful to the climate as the Belledune coal-fired power plant** [20, 21].

5. No to pollution threatening human and animal health

The impacts of gas combustion on public health are well documented. Emissions of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and tropospheric ozone (O₃) irritate the respiratory tract, and fine particles are carcinogenic and cause cardiovascular disease [22, 23, 24, 25]. These impacts directly affect neighbouring communities, primarily children, the elderly, pregnant women and those already suffering from respiratory diseases [26]. Prolonged exposure, even at low concentrations, is associated with an increase in chronic respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases and premature mortality, and potentially to certain cancers [26]. **The health effects of the pollutants**

emitted by this plant translate into additional costs for our already strained health care system [27, 28]. We take notice that for these reasons, Lung NB and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment have already taken a firm stand against the plant [29, 30]. This pollution will also affect the health of 165 rare or protected animal species [31] in the vicinity of the plant.

6. Showing strong leadership in clean energy

New Brunswick can become a leader in clean energy in the Atlantic region. The development of renewable energy and energy efficiency generates more local and sustainable jobs, particularly in rural areas, than large, centralised fossil fuel projects [8]. **Increasing renewable electricity production combined with battery storage can meet demand at a lower cost and without endangering the health of people here and elsewhere, while significantly reducing the province's GHG emissions.**

For these reasons, we ask that you immediately suspend this project, request that NB Power issue a call for tenders for an electricity battery storage project, and redirect investments towards solutions for the future: renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Yours sincerely,

The signatories (alphabetical order):

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Notes:

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