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Province's conditions on Tantramar gas plant dismissed as weak

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by John Chilibeck, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter
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August 28, 2026

Environment Minister Gilles LePage. Photo: Government of New Brunswick

New Brunswick has granted conditional approval for a new, controversial gas plant in Tantramar that will provide electricity to the grid when there are shortages.

Environment Minister Gilles LePage announced on Friday his department hadimposed 45 conditions the American firm ProEnergy must fulfill, either before building the 500-megawatt gas turbine plant or while running it over the next 25 years on behalf of NB Power.

A coalition opposed to the plant in southeastern New Brunswick immediately condemned the conditions as inadequate for protecting people's health, wildlife and the environment.

"Our department will always consider environmental impacts, human impacts first, not the business case," LePage told reporters during a press conference in Fredericton. He added that violations of the conditions could be handled in different ways, from giving the firm 30 days to correct the problem to shutting down the plant until changes are made.

"We're not there to evaluate the business case and the impact on business. We're there to protect the environment," he said.

Fire risks

But Lisa Griffin, a spokeswoman for the Protect the Chignecto Isthmus Coalition, said at first blush, the conditions looked weak.

PCIC Communications consultant Lisa Griffin

Thumbing through the environmental impact assessment document on Friday afternoon, shortly after its public release, she was critical that the Tantramar Fire Department, staffed by volunteers, was responsible for fire safety at a plant where diesel would be stored. The diesel would be a backup fuel if something goes wrong with the natural gas pipeline that runs by the facility.

The fire hall is in the old town of Sackville, about 20 kilometres away from Centre Village, close to where the plant would be run.

"It's very strange that during a hot drought, they could be pulling firefighters from out of town, when that department is already under severe strain. Those firefighters may be needed in town, but they might all be at the plant, putting out a fire there. What then?" Griffin asked.

She also shook her head that one of the conditions is for PROENERGY to ensure information sharing with Elsipogtog First Nation throughout the project. It is not the closest Indigenous community to the site in question – Fort Folly is –but it is the biggest in New Brunswick.

"They've done the public consultation with them. They've got their answer. They don't approve. And their environmental impact assessment from the Elsipogtog community hasn't come out yet. So, there's complete disregard for their processes as well."

No Indigenous partnership

NB Power had originally promoted the project – called the Renewables Integration and Grid Security project or RIGS for short – as a partnership between PROENERGY and the North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council. However, almost as soon as it was announced in the summer of 2025, the partnership crumbled, with some of the nine Mi'kmaq chiefs saying they hadn't been properly consulted.

The tribal council does not represent all of them, but the Mi'gmawe'l Tplu'taqnn Inc., a non-profit organization representing Mi'gmaq First Nations in New Brunswick, does.

It did not immediately reply for comment on Friday.

A spokesperson for PROENERGY would not answer questions posed by *Brunswick News*.

"Another important regulatory decision has been received, and we wish to thank all the Rightsholders and stakeholders that have supported and participated in the process for progress to date," wrote Francis Kusznir, a vice president with the company in Houston, Texas, in an email.

The permitting and regulatory process is ongoing and, accordingly, we are not providing comment or granting interviews until permitting and regulatory requirements have been fully met."

The department used a technical review committee, made up of dozens of experts from 20 different federal, provincial and local agencies, to come up with the rules. The conditions shouldn't come as a surprise to PROENERGY, as the committee asked it questions throughout the process over several months.

Of the 45 conditions, seven must be fulfilled before construction starts and five more must be undertaken before the plant starts operating. The remaining 33 must be followed as the plant runs.

Health risks 'minimal'

"Throughout the review, we listened carefully to the concerns raised by First Nations, stakeholders, and the public, regarding the project's potential effect on the environment, and requested additional information from PROENERGY where necessary," LePage said.

"A human health risk assessment concluded that risks are negligible to minimal. Air quality monitoring will be conducted to maintain compliance with regulatory standards during operations. Groundwater sustainability was also a main concern for residents. To that effect, there are 10 conditions related to groundwater sustainability, which, in part, detail the maximum allowable well pumping rates and long-term water monitoring."

NB Power has signed a power purchase agreement for 25 years with PROENERGY, which has a lot of experience running such facilities in the United States and was quick to source the turbines, the main reason it won the contract.

All told, the deal is expected to cost NB Power's nearly 400,000 direct customers close to $2.8 billion over its 25-year lifetime, pushing electricity rates up in the first year alone by five per cent.

The plant is only supposed to run when NB Power doesn't have the right conditions to operate its wind turbines or solar energy, or during the winter peak if one of its major generators such as the Point Lepreau nuclear plant or Mactaquac hydro station is not working.

One of the stipulations is for the plant not to run more than 17 per cent of the time each year (PROENERGY said it would likely only operate close to seven per cent of the time, but wanted a cushion for the upper possible range, according to provincial officials).

NB Power has said if the plant is not up and running by 2028, the province risks brownouts or rolling blackouts. The public utility's CEO, Lori Clark, has warned that the need for more electricity is so dire, NB Power will likely have to build another gas plant after the Tantramar is in operation.

Griffin, who lives in Shediac and works for the Atlantic Wildlife Institute, said such talk was enough to convince her she should consider moving from the province.

"I'm not going to live here and I'm not going to let my parents live out their last 10 years here while the water and the air are being poisoned," she said.

"We will fight as much as we can, and we will keep the truth above the water as much as we can, but we know that we don't need a new fossil fuels plant and that we could just implement renewables instead because other countries have done it and are doing it."

This story from Brunswick News was written by Local Journalism Initiative Reporter John Chilibeck.

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