

**Manitoba Hydro Needs for and Alternatives To (NFAT) Review**

Manitoba Public Utilities Board

Presentation of Elder Flora Beardy, York Landing, Manitoba

March 14, 2014 – Thompson, Manitoba

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It is my understanding that there will be a Manitoba Hydro rate increase of about four percent every year for the next twenty years or so. The proposed Manitoba Hydro rate increases will be a hardship, especially for those who are on fixed incomes such as senior citizens. I do not recall Manitoba Hydro talking with us about these rate increases.

I spend on our groceries a little bit less than what we pay for Hydro all year. Our grocery bill would exceed our Hydro bill if I shopped in the community. Because we shop in Thompson we manage to spend a little bit less on our food than we do on our Hydro bills.

For example, I can purchase two, four litre bottles of milk in Thompson for the price of one litre of milk at the store in my community. I can do this when I can travel to Thompson by road during the summer months when the ferry is available and during the winter months when the winter road is available.

Prices of food in our community are very high. We try to shop in Thompson every chance we get. Sometimes seven or eight people will get together for a charter plane and go shopping. It is not as costly as seven or eight of us going on scheduled flights on Perimeter Airlines. Charters are also better if seven or eight of us want to shop together because the Perimeter flights are often sold out and we have to go on standby. Every year travel rates go up on Perimeter.

When we travel on the scheduled flights we leave groceries at Perimeter cargo but we are not guaranteed that the groceries will be on the next flight. When this happens, our foods, vegetables and other dairy products can be spoiled.

I share this story about how we shop for food to show that we are always thinking about how we can feed and provide for our families and make ends meet with the little money that we have. We also try to take advantage of every trip out of the community to shop for food and the things that we need for our families.

I also share this story so that you can understand that those of us on fixed incomes in our communities like seniors can't just go shopping at a discount store. We do a lot of planning together to save money on food and other things so we can pay our other bills like our Hydro bills.

I have heard that some people say that because we supposedly have free housing on the reserve that people on fixed incomes should have more money to pay for things like our Hydro bills. We do not get free housing on our reserve. The Band has to pay the mortgages for the houses. The people who have jobs pay rent to the Band, and the Band pays the mortgage. There is a shelter allowance for people on social assistance and the Band uses the shelter allowance to pay the mortgage.

The Band pays the Hydro bills for people on social assistance. The rest of the people have to pay for their own Hydro bills and if they can't pay they fall into arrears. If they are in arrears too long, Hydro will disconnect their house.

When the spring comes, it should be a time for looking forward to hunting geese and catching pickerel and planning for our Goose Camp Days celebrations. But we see May 15 as the day when Hydro crews come in to start disconnecting people who are in arrears on their Hydro bills.

To keep a home from being disconnected, the Band will make arrangements to pay for the bills that are in arrears with money that the Band really doesn't have.

Hydro says they will start going into the communities on May 15. It is still very cold this time of year. People have had their meters disconnected when they are not at home. This has happened in the past.

Families have lost food that was in their freezers because of no power. Extra money is needed pay for these lost foods. We all have game and fish in our freezers to feed our families. It takes a lot of effort and money to harvest and replace these foods if they are lost.

Families will resort to anything to protect their children. Disconnections cause a lot of stress for everyone.

When a house is disconnected, extension cords are sometimes run from one home to another. This is very dangerous. A meter was once removed from an unoccupied home and connected onto a house where a meter had been disconnected. I don't know what Hydro did in this case. This is also dangerous.

If a home becomes unoccupied because there is no electricity in the home, rodents will get into the home and mold will set in which is a health hazard. It is very expensive to renovate a house that has mold and sometimes families have no choice but to live in a house that has mold.

There is more than one family sharing most of the houses in our community and there is a lot of washing and cooking and bathing, so we have to keep the electricity connected. Electricity is a necessity in our homes.

We use electricity to heat our houses and there are cold days during every month up here in the north. Only a few of our houses have wood stoves. Most of our Hydro bill is for heating our houses.

Hydro should come in to the community and do workshops and help us understand the options and opportunities for their Power Smart and low income programs. The brochures really do not give us all the information that we need and it would be good to have this information explained in Cree. Hydro should work with us to deliver the home insulation and other Power Smart programs for every single house on the reserve. This would help reduce our Hydro bills.

I have looked at the document Manitoba Hydro gave to explain why there are two electric meters on the houses of Hydro employees at Gillam. This document says that Hydro employees pay a lower electricity rate to heat their houses and that this rate is the same as the lowest average heating cost in Winnipeg.

If every house in York Landing had two Hydro meters like the Hydro employees so that we paid the same heating costs as the lowest average heating cost people pay in Winnipeg, this would really help us lower our Hydro bills.

I understand that we pay for some of the cost of our own Hydro compensation and mitigation programs when we pay our Hydro bills. We shouldn't have pay Hydro back for the same programs that are supposed to compensate us for the adverse effects of Hydro's projects. This would also reduce our Hydro bills.

It is important that Manitoba Hydro do everything possible help us to keep our Hydro bills as low as possible.

If Manitoba Hydro did all of these things and really worked with us to reduce our Hydro bills, there would be more trust and a better relationship between Hydro and people in the community.

Ekosi. Thank you!