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## **RMA Supports Changes to Renewable Energy Development, Looks Forward to a Stronger Municipal Voice in the Process**

**Nisku, AB, February 29, 2024** – On February 28, 2024, the Government of Alberta released its renewed path forward for renewable energy development. The approach includes several changes to the project approval and reclamation process, including automatic standing for municipalities in Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) hearings, stronger reclamation requirements for renewable projects, and restrictions on development on agricultural lands. The RMA is confident that the changes will position the province’s renewable energy industry to grow strategically, minimize land use conflicts, allow for local support and concerns to be considered during project application reviews, and ensure that industry is held responsible for end-of-life obligations.

“The changes made to the renewable energy project application process and reclamation requirements are a positive development for rural municipalities, landowners, and the future growth of the industry. Renewable energy projects are hugely important to the present and future of rural communities across the province, as well as to building a resilient and efficient energy system. Rural Alberta continues to support the industry and we hope this path forward will lead to better relationships between rural municipalities and the renewable energy sector.”  
- RMA President Paul McLaughlin

A key aspect of the new approach is a focus on the preservation of agricultural land in Alberta. Agriculture is crucial to Alberta’s economy and plays a major role in food security, both within the province and beyond. As much of the world faces a hotter, drier future, protecting productive agricultural land will become even more important. The AUC’s new “agriculture first” approach to project approvals will ensure that the province’s most productive lands are protected, while allowing for development if project proponents demonstrate the ability for agricultural practices and renewable energy generation to co-exist. While the RMA did not propose restrictions on any specific soil type, this approach will be effective in driving innovation and growth in utilizing land for multiple purposes.

“Rural Alberta provides food security not only for the province, but for the nation. Ensuring that the growth of the renewable energy industry does not come at the cost of agricultural land is crucial to maintaining food production in future years and decades. An agriculture first approach is an excellent step into ensuring the protection of these lands and driving innovation

in both the renewables and agriculture industries. We look forward to seeing how this is implemented.” – RMA President Paul McLauchlin

The RMA is also supportive of the implementation of reclamation security requirements for renewable energy projects. Much like other large-scale industrial energy projects, wind and solar developments pose liability risks associated with decommissioning and reclamation. Industry should be held responsible for managing these risks through a process administered by the AUC or Government of Alberta. Rural municipalities have firsthand experience with the inadequate liability management system in place for the oil and gas industry; it is a relief that these mistakes will not be repeated with the renewable energy sector.

“Reclamation is critical for municipalities as large-scale industrial developments can have major long-term environmental and land use impacts. The province’s decision to implement reclamation security requirements will prevent a repeat of the ongoing issues associated with the oil and gas sector, including thousands of abandoned wells,” said McLauchlin. “Companies must be held accountable for the entire lifespan of a project, not just the profitable periods. We are looking forward to the implementation of a reclamation security system, as it will significantly reduce risks for landowners and municipalities.”

The RMA is awaiting more information on viewscape restrictions and Crown land development to better understand how they will impact industry growth and local land use and economic development opportunities. It is currently unclear how “pristine viewscape” will be defined, but an overly broad definition could risk sterilizing renewable growth in large areas of the province, causing significant missed opportunities for both industry and rural municipalities. The RMA will continue to advocate that viewscape impacts be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Municipalities are stewards of the land and knowledgeable of local benefits and risks associated with any large-scale project. The changes to the project approval process to grant municipalities automatic standing in hearing processes will help to ensure that projects are evaluated based on both their provincewide and local impacts. Rural Alberta remains supportive of the renewable energy industry and sees the potential for incredible economic growth. The RMA is optimistic that the changes proposed by the Government of Alberta will lead to smart, strategic growth and minimize land use impacts.

“One of the most impactful changes coming to the project approval process is recognition that municipalities must have an opportunity to be at the table for every project. Renewable energy provides big opportunities for rural communities, but the wrong project can also introduce big risks,” said McLauchlin. “Ensuring municipal land use plans are considered and municipal input is weighed will help the AUC to weed out poor quality projects and increase local buy-in for the companies that do business the right way: collaborating with municipalities, talking to residents, and adapting projects to ensure that they are beneficial for all involved. We are so

pleased that our message on the importance of the municipal voice in this process was heard by the AUC and the Government of Alberta.