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AUC Releases Report Outlining Renewable Energy Approval Review Findings

Following the recent provincial announcement on changes to renewable energy project approvals, the AUC has released their findings from the Module A inquiry

In February 2024, the Minister of Affordability and Utilities [announced several policy changes](#) to the renewable energy project approval process, which are partially based on an [inquiry conducted](#) by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) into the ongoing economic, orderly, and efficient development of electricity generation in Alberta. Announced policy changes will include:

- ◆ A requirement that the AUC take an “agriculture first” approach when evaluating the best use of agricultural lands proposed for renewable development.
- ◆ Development will no longer be permitted on Class 1 and 2 lands, unless the proponent can demonstrate the ability for crops / livestock to coexist with the development.
- ◆ Provincial government will establish the tools necessary to ensure Alberta’s grasslands, irrigable, and productive lands will be available for agricultural production.
- ◆ Developers will be responsible for reclamation costs via bond or security.
- ◆ Buffer zones of 35 kilometres will be established around protected areas and other pristine viewsapes as designated by the province.
- ◆ Any development on Crown lands will be on a case-by-case basis.

The AUC has released its [Module A report](#), which summarizes the submissions and observations made by stakeholders during the inquiry process, as well a series of AUC commitments and options for specific paths forward on the issues within the scope of the inquiry. **The** RMA’s understanding of the process is that the Government of Alberta has committed to the high-level changes summarized above based in part on the inquiry report and options included within. It is also **the** RMA’s understanding that the AUC commitments mainly focus on changes to the project approval process that are within the AUC’s control to change without broader government permission or direction.

Notable AUC commitments and options include the following:

- ◆ Municipal participation rights will be automatically granted, and municipalities will be eligible to request cost recovery for participation.
- ◆ The Commission will undertake a review of Rule 007 related to municipal submission requirements and clarify consultation requirements.
- ◆ The Commission will review Rule 007 requirements regarding proponent commitments in relation to reclamation and security funding obligations.
- ◆ The Commission will enhance the existing visual impact assessment requirements within Rule 007 to include a more structured visual impact assessment methodology within the AUC application review process.

Options

*NOTE – The AUC has provided multiple options for government to consider on some issues.

- ◆ Assess the value of creating a province-wide integrated multi-criteria evaluation tool to identify and evaluate agricultural land.
- ◆ Do not place restrictions on use of any particular agricultural land classes. Rely on the enhancement of AUC processes, including increased municipal government involvement, and focus on agricultural land preservation.
- ◆ Develop an agricultural directive as a tool to reduce agricultural land impacts.
- ◆ Restrict development on some classes of agricultural land.
- ◆ Enhance regional planning to guide areas for development.
- ◆ Perform a benefit-screening exercise to determine if it is worth implementing a policy to use Crown land for power plant development.
- ◆ Rely on existing processes utilized for the disposition of Crown land by the government and the review of power plant applications by the AUC.
- ◆ Implement a new two-step land disposition process for Crown land dispositions by the government and continue to rely on the existing process for review of power plant applications by the AUC.
- ◆ If implementing a reclamation security regime, set key outcomes, principles, and parameters for the regime.
- ◆ If implementing a reclamation security regime, a range of options are available for the government to ensure the proponent funds all reclamation costs.
- ◆ Provide guidance on valued viewscales.
- ◆ Define “no-go” restricted viewscale zones.

The [report](#) can be found on the [AUC’s website](#).

The AUC has announced that it will continue to work stakeholders and the Government of Alberta to implement the policy changes.

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