

Climate Change

Climate change is a real and pressing concern and meaningful action is required to both mitigate and adapt to these concerns. The Government of Alberta is striving to address climate change in a way that will reduce emissions without overregulating and slowing the economy and has implemented the Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction (TIER) system to encourage industrial facilities to find innovative ways to reduce emissions and invest in clean technology to stay competitive. The federal government has made climate change a priority by making strong commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and committing to net-zero emissions by 2050. These guiding policies demonstrate that rural municipalities need to be proactive in the climate change discussion.

What is the RMA's position on the importance of having a municipal perspective on matters related to climate change and climate change initiatives?

- ◆ Municipalities recognize the risks of climate change and are active participants in programs that aim to reduce impacts for the benefit of current and future generations (ex. participation in programs offered through the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre).
- ◆ Rural municipalities are partners in Alberta's climate change initiatives.
- ◆ Climate change policy should consider the social, economic, and environmental impacts and benefits of agriculture and food production, as well as the ecological goods and services derived from the rural land base.
- ◆ Many rural municipalities lack an opportunity to access funding for project types often linked to climate change mitigation, such as public transit. Climate change requirements and funding programs must be designed to include rural municipalities and allow for developing climate resiliency in rural infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to climate change?

- ◆ All climate change mitigation and adaptation policies should be accompanied by tangible and realistic performance measures to ensure success and constant improvement, but also to ensure benefits are realized at the least cost.
- ◆ Changes to reporting requirements for municipalities, such as the Canadian Sustainability Disclosure Standards, must consider that municipalities exist as a public body providing local services, and should therefore not be held to the same standard as other entities.
- ◆ All provincial and federal funding for municipal disaster mitigation should be stable and consistent and consider high risk areas as well as communities that may lack the capacity to effectively implement mitigation strategies.
- ◆ Initiatives that require climate-related risk and opportunities disclosures should exempt municipalities, as they do not exist to operate for profit, and their emissions are tied to community infrastructure and services.

What collaborative relationships are essential to rural municipalities in matters relating to climate change and climate change initiatives?

- ◆ To support a cohesive approach to addressing climate change, municipalities should work collaboratively with their neighbours and Indigenous communities to access programs and leverage resources that will provide local and regional benefits.
- ◆ The Government of Alberta and Alberta Utilities Commission are collaborating with municipalities in understanding and mitigating the unintended local land use impacts of renewable energy developments. RMA will continue to engage to support policy changes that protect agricultural land.

How does the work of the RMA support the climate change initiatives in Alberta?

- ◆ The RMA is actively involved in the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre (MCCAC), which provides technical assistance and expertise to municipalities to increase energy efficiency of operations and support the reduction of greenhouse gases.
- ◆ The MCCAC provides technical expertise to support initiatives that reflect local mitigation and adaptation priorities and contribute to achieving global climate change goals.

What current climate change related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Hydrogen

- ◆ Alberta has the potential to be a world leader in hydrogen energy development however, provincial decision-makers must consider the local impacts and benefits of hydrogen on agricultural lands and economic development.
- ◆ Municipalities play a significant role in helping the federal government achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, as the majority of hydrogen infrastructure is located on the land within rural municipalities.
- ◆ Hydrogen energy projects must be equipped with an end-of-life of management plan for the infrastructure and assets to ensure that such infrastructure is not left on the rural landscape to the detriment of rural landowners.

Federal Carbon Levy

- ◆ To demonstrate the importance of addressing climate change, revenue received from the carbon levy should be redirected to address climate change mitigation and adaptation directly.
- ◆ Municipalities operate using taxpayer funding and, as such, to avoid double taxation on Albertans and higher municipal costs, municipalities should be exempt from the carbon levy.
- ◆ Rural residents have limited alternative transportation options which limits their ability to reduce their use of fossil-fuel powered vehicles. This will remain the case until affordable transportation technologies become available that are suitable for use in rural areas.

- ◆ Without viable alternatives, incentive programs will have little effect in reducing carbon emissions. Alternatives for transportation and other municipal operations, such as the operation of heavy machinery, are needed to realize reductions in emissions.
- ◆ A portion of the carbon levy should be dedicated to support municipalities whose economies are dependent on high carbon industries as they transition to low carbon economic activities.
- ◆ Agriculture serves an important role in carbon sequestration. The agricultural sector has a unique ability to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, store or sequester carbon in soils, and increase the resilience of soils to a changing climate.
- ◆ A made in Alberta solution for lowering carbon levels allows a local solution and transition period as opposed to a federally mandated approach.
- ◆ When considering climate change related legislation and policies, the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada must consider, not only the direct costs to municipalities and rural residents but also the indirect costs that are distributed throughout the rural economy.

Renewable Energy

- ◆ The approval processes for solar and wind projects must have both clarity and transparency to ensure landowners and communities are informed about the projects developed on and surrounding their lands.
- ◆ It is crucial that the Government of Alberta ensures that all renewable energy infrastructure and property may be assessed by municipalities in a fair manner.
- ◆ When undertaking renewable projects, the government, and regulators such as Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) should adhere to municipal land-use bylaws and municipal planning documents such as municipal development plans.
- ◆ The Alberta Utilities Commission must balance the benefits of renewable energy development and the preservation of prime agricultural land to protect food security when considering whether proposed renewable energy projects are in the public interest.
- ◆ Rural municipalities should have the authority to properly locate renewable energy projects within their boundaries to ensure efficient and effective land-use planning and to minimize any disturbance to residents.
- ◆ Renewable energy projects must be equipped with an end-of-life of management plan for the renewable energy infrastructure and assets to ensure that such infrastructure is not left on the rural landscape to the detriment of rural landowners.

Just Transition to Net Zero Emission by 2050

- ◆ Rural municipalities are often directly impacted by energy and resource development projects because rural Alberta is the home to most of Alberta's energy resources. These projects are extremely important to the continued economic growth as they attract workers into rural Alberta and support the viability of rural communities through taxes and maintaining infrastructure. It is essential for the federal government to assess potential impacts on workers and communities while considering climate change as policy decisions to phase out or limit the use of certain industries or products will directly impact communities and rural Albertans.
- ◆ Economic diversification, as part of a transition to net-zero, requires stable municipal finance to maintain and improve local infrastructure and municipal services. Therefore, the federal government must provide funding that will be eligible for municipalities and workers in energy-based communities to help support them in this transition.

- ◆ In order for Canada to successfully achieve its net-zero targets, it is important that no community or worker is left behind in the transition. The federal government must work with all levels of government and industry to help provide employment, training, and financial supports to ensure a smooth transition.
- ◆ As many rural areas will be directly impacted by the transition to a low carbon economy, the RMA believes there should be a rural worker and rural municipal perspective on the Net-Zero Advisory Body to ensure that there is a balance between achieving climate leadership and the sustainability of communities impacted by this transition.

Warren Noga

Manager of Policy and Research

825.319.2285

warren@RMAlberta.com