



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 29, 2014

Alberta Energy Regulator unlikely to advance public interest – new report

Single regulator makes it easier for industry, but maintains old barriers to public participation

EDMONTON – A new fact sheet released this morning by the Parkland Institute finds that Alberta's new energy regulator, the AER, will do very little to improve Albertans' abilities to have a say in how the province's energy resources, particularly its massive bitumen deposits, are developed.

The fact sheet, written by University of Manitoba sociologists Mark Hudson and Evan Bowness, is titled *Directly and Adversely Affected: Public Participation in Tar Sands Development 2005-2014*.

Hudson and Bowness track the degree to which Alberta citizens were able to impact and influence tar sands developments in Alberta under the previous model through the Environmental Resources Conservation Board (ERCB), Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESD), and the Environmental Appeals Board (EAB).

Their findings suggest that the public's engagement in the process of decision-making in relation to bitumen projects was negligible, and that this was due in considerable part to the province's rules governing who could participate, and under what conditions. In particular, the definition of terms like "directly affected," along with prohibitive procedural requirements restricting who could be heard, seriously limited citizens' power.

"The province consolidated energy approvals under a single regulator to make it easier for corporate energy developers," says Hudson, "but the evidence shows that it was pretty easy for them already. Virtually every project presented was approved, even the very few of them that went to public hearings or appeals."

In looking at the structures and provisions of the Alberta Energy Regulator, which came fully into force on April 1, 2014, Hudson and Bowness found that despite some positive signs that transparency will improve, the same provisions that restricted citizen participation and input under the old model remain in place, particularly the narrow interpretation of the "directly and adversely impacted" filter for participants.

"Our research shows that the old system was heavily stacked against concerned citizens," says Hudson, "yet the move to a single regulator seems to have done very little to address those shortcomings, focusing on developer-side improvements."

Parkland's Research Director, Shannon Stunden Bower, highlights the implications of the findings: "These resources belong to all Albertans and should be managed in the public interest, but the regulatory process the government has put in place makes it virtually impossible for average Albertans to have their voices heard. That's a problem."

The Parkland Institute is a non-partisan public policy research institute in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. The full report is available for download on the institute's website at <http://parklandinstitute.ca>.

- 30 -

For more info, or to arrange interviews:

Shannon Stunden Bower, Research Director, Parkland Institute (w) 780-492-6112, (c) 780-937-9599, stundenbower@ualberta.ca

Mark Hudson, author, (w) 204-272-1655, mark.hudson@umanitoba.ca

Evan Bowness, co-author, evan.bowness@umanitoba.ca