The Development of Renewable Electricity Policy in the Province of Ontario

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Abstract:
This article examines the development of policy to promote renewable electricity in the province of Ontario (Canada) between 1995 and 2006. Drawing upon both a 'multiple streams approach' and the role of ideas in policy development, it is argued that changes in the problem, policy and politics streams – and their coupling by a key political entrepreneur – account for two significant shifts in Ontario's efforts to promote increased use of renewable electricity. The first shift occurred on 3 July 2003, when the Ontario Commissioner of Alternative Energy, Steve Gilchrist, announced that sole dependence upon free markets to support renewable electricity was being displaced by a new commitment to a renewable portfolio standard. The second shift occurred on 21 March 2006, when the Ontario Premier, Dalton McGuinty, announced that dependence upon a bidding system to promote renewable electricity was being supplemented by a commitment to feed-in tariffs. A focus upon the evolution of ideas, combined with an appreciation for timing, continues to provide the explanation for the development of renewable electricity policy in Ontario.

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Introduction

In the development of policy on renewable electricity in Ontario, two different press conferences are particularly noteworthy. The first took place in downtown Toronto on the roof of the offices of the province's largest power producer, Ontario Power Generation, on 3 July 2003. In the middle of the city's second smog alert of the summer, remarks by the Commissioner of Alternative Energy, Steve Gilchrist, confirmed a fundamental change in the policy direction of the Progressive Conservative Government: sole dependence upon free markets to support renewable electricity was being displaced by a new commitment to a renewable portfolio standard. (For a definition of renewable portfolio standard, see Table 1.) The second was held in Cambridge, Ontario on 21 March 2006. On the floor of a solar panel factory, comments by the Ontario Premier, Dalton McGuinty, identified a new policy interest of the Liberal Government: dependence upon a renewable portfolio standard to promote renewable electricity was being supplemented by a commitment to feed-in tariffs. (For a definition of feed-in tariffs, see Table 1.) The two press conferences are notable not only for the significant shift in policy direction announced at each, but also for the setting chosen for each. Recognition of the outdoor and urban surroundings in the first and the labour-intensive manufacturing background in the second helps to demonstrate the importance of ideas and timing in the development of renewable electricity policy in Ontario.

The problem definition and agenda-setting phases of policy-making on renewable electricity in Ontario between 1995 and 2006 cannot adequately be explained by a conventional 'rational actor' approach (see, for example, Landry, 1996). The fundamental shifts described above did not coincide with a significant change in the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action. Instead, the ways in which problems were understood, the presence or absence of alternative solutions and the development of wider events not primarily associated with renewable electricity need to be considered together in order to explain the evolution of policy. Accordingly, I rely upon theoretical constructs that emphasize the role of 'ideas' and the significance of 'timing' in my analysis of the development of Ontario's renewable electricity policy.

Table 1 – Selected Renewable Electricity Policy Options

Name of policy option	Alternative names used	Brief definition/description
Bidding system	Request for proposals	A competition scheme where the contracts to build projects with the lowest generation costs are chosen.
Feed-in tariffs	Guaranteed prices; renewable energy tariffs	A guaranteed price per unit of electricity that a utility, supplier, or grid operator is required to pay for renewable electricity from privately-owned generators.
Regulatory approach		Emission restrictions are placed upon electricity suppliers in order to encourage 'cleaner sources', including renewables.
Renewable portfolio standard	Obligations; quota systems	An obligation is placed upon electricity suppliers to provide a set quantity or percentage of their electricity supply from renewable energy sources.

Source: Adapted from IEA (2006).

By focusing upon 'ideas', I aim to draw attention to the ways in which conceptualisations of both the policy 'problem' and the policy 'solution' are developed, articulated, presented and debated in the political arena. Within the scholarly analysis of public policy-making, interest in this kind of approach has taken a number of different forms. 'Frames', for example, have been used to underscore the importance of the 'underlying structures of belief, perception, and appreciation' upon which policy positions rest (Schön and Rein, 1994, 23). Similarly, the 'process of characterizing problems in the political arena' has been identified as critical, often labelled 'problem definition' (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994, 3-4). Meanwhile, 'policy images', which are used by specialists to communicate ideas to the broader public, have been presented as 'simplified ways of explaining the issues and justifying public policy approaches to them' (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, 26); they have been presented as integral to the understanding of policy processes. The importance of the particular 'discourse' that dominates – that is, 'the ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena' (Hajer, 1993, 45) – has also been highlighted. Efforts to develop a 'postempiricist alternative' (Fischer, 2003) and a 'deliberative approach to policy analysis' (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003) also highlight the significant role of ideas.

By contrast, my focus upon ‘timing’ predominantly relies upon one set of insights – namely, the multiple streams approach. According to this, much movement in the policy process can be explained by the efforts of policy entrepreneurs to exploit occasional ‘policy windows’ by coupling elements in three different ‘streams’: problems, policies and politics (Kingdon, 2003). The problem stream focuses upon the ways in which different mechanisms – in particular, ‘indicators, focusing events, and feedback’ (Kingdon, 2003, 113) – bring problems to the attention of policy-makers. The second stream can be envisaged as a ‘policy primeval soup’: members of policy communities (specialists in a given policy area) generate alternatives and proposals related to the issue-area; some ideas survive and prosper, others do not (Kingdon, 2003, 117). Meanwhile, the politics stream, as the name suggests, is primarily concerned with ‘politics’, narrowly defined – more specifically, it draws attention to ‘electoral, partisan, or pressure group factors’ (Kingdon, 2003, 145). Each stream flows along independently of the others. There are instances, however, when certain individuals – who are also known as policy entrepreneurs – make links across the streams and thus stimulate policy change.

Specific attention to ideas and timing is not new. Indeed, a number of public policy analysts encourage the concurrent use of different frameworks. There are close links among, for example, the ‘advocacy coalition framework’ (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993), the ‘punctuated-equilibrium framework’ (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993) and the ‘multiple streams approach’ (Kingdon, 2003). Certainly, there are distinctions among them – for example, the role of the media receives relatively greater emphasis in the advocacy coalition framework (xxx) than in the multiple streams approach (Kingdon, 2003, 57-61) – but the common emphasis on cognition, particularly when contrasted with approaches like the rational actor model (Allison, 1971, Chapter 1), institutional rational choice (Ostrom, 1999) and incrementalism (Lindblom, 1959), is worth noting. Indeed, John (1998, 145) groups a variety of themes together and identifies them as ‘ideas-based approaches in public policy’ – ‘the ideas these actors bring to the public sphere that are the reasons for policy change and stability’.[1] Following this trend in public policy studies, I use the multiple streams model as the structural foundation, for it serves to provide me with substantial insight into the development of renewable electricity policy in Ontario. I do, however, supplement it with contributions from this broader range approaches that

[1] Additionally, Schlager (1999, 252) sees ‘serendipity’ as a significant part of the explanation for policy change that is common to a number of approaches.

I am grouping together under the heading of 'ideas'. Methodically, I am responding to those who call for the use of qualitative approaches in an eclectic manner, particularly when doing exploratory research (in new issue-areas) so that frameworks can act as heuristics to improve our understanding (compare with Palys, 2003).

The article proceeds as follows. The context is first set by describing the electricity supply system in Ontario, and the sustainability challenges that have served to promote interest in using renewable sources of energy (e.g., solar, wind, biomass and small hydropower) to generate electricity. Consideration then turns to the development of renewable electricity policy in Ontario between 1995 and 2006. In particular, the two critical shifts identified in the first paragraph of this article are described and analysed. Specific attention is paid to developments, during these 11 years, in the problem, policy and political streams, and the ways in which key political entrepreneurs coupled the streams at critical times. The article finishes with an investigation of the future of renewable electricity policy-making in Ontario and the future development of public policy theory more generally.

Context

Traditionally in Canada, provinces have had the exclusive right to make laws in relation to the 'development, conservation and management of sites and facilities in the province for the generation and production of electrical energy' (Section 92A, The Constitution Act 1867, the country's founding constitutional document (Government of Canada, 2006)). As a result, individual provinces have taken the lead in determining the fate of their respective electricity systems. In Ontario – the country's largest province, with a population of 12.6 million inhabitants – electricity was, throughout the twentieth century, primarily managed by Ontario Hydro, an integrated, monopoly crown corporation.[2] As the name suggests, Ontario's electricity supply profile was initially founded upon the province's rich hydroelectric resources. By the 1950s, however, this had been supplemented by fossil fuels (primarily coal); in the 1970s, moreover, nuclear power began to enter the supply picture. By the mid-1990s, annual electricity demand in Ontario totalled 137 TWhr – almost equally divided among the residential,

[2] The one major aspect of the electricity supply system that was not controlled by Ontario Hydro was distribution: instead, hundreds of local electricity distribution companies (publicly-owned by municipalities) managed the 'movement' of electricity from high-voltage transmission lines (managed by Ontario Hydro) through to individual customers within their respective boundaries.

commercial and industrial end-uses (1995 figures from IESO, 2004, 3; and Natural Resources Canada, 1999). Demand peaked in the winter at 22,812 MW (IESO, 2004, 3). Electricity was supplied almost exclusively by a portfolio of power stations located within the province. The largest contributors were nuclear power plants (57%), followed by hydroelectric power stations (26%), coal-fired power stations (11%) and natural gas-fired power stations (6%).[3] Therefore, 'renewable electricity' in Ontario was almost exclusively in the form of large-scale hydropower stations (like those located at Niagara Falls). If interest in 'renewable electricity' is restricted to what is sometimes called 'low-impact renewable' or 'new renewable'[4] – often focusing upon selected forms of solar, wind, biomass and small hydropower – then its development in Ontario to the mid-1990s was quite modest, largely restricted to small hydro stations that had been developed by Ontario Hydro. Nevertheless, given the growing debate at this time about the sustainability of established electricity supply systems (compare with, for example, Holdren and Smith, 2000; and IEA, 2001), the attractiveness of conventional resources like fossil fuels, uranium and large dams was falling, while interest in alternative sources was rising.

The Progressive Conservative Government's Policy on Renewable Electricity from 1995 to 2003

In September 1995, the Progressive Conservative Party won a majority of seats in the Ontario legislature. In their campaign manifesto, entitled the 'Common Sense Revolution' (CSR), renewable electricity received no attention. Worth recognising, however, is that two key policy directions for electricity, more broadly, were identified in that document: first, electricity rates were to be frozen for five years; and, second, the promise was made to consider 'some moves towards [the] privatization of non-nuclear assets' (Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, 1994).

With the CSR serving to guide decision-making by the new Progressive Conservative Government, the electricity agenda soon focused upon how market discipline and competition

[3] For the sake of comparison, electricity demand in 2005 in Ontario was 155 TWhr, with commercial demand (in 2003) accounting for 37%, residential 33% and industrial 29% (Government of Ontario, 2006d; OEB, 2006). In 2005, demand peaked in the summer at 26,160 MW, and the largest contributors to electricity supply were nuclear power plants (51%), hydroelectric power stations (22%), coal-fired power sations (19%) and natural gas-fried power stations (7%) (Government of Ontario, 2006d).

[4] 'Renewable', when used in terms like 'renewable energy' and 'renewable electricity', can be a contested term. Similarly, terms like 'green energy' and 'clean energy' can also mean different things to different people. (See, for example, Rowlands et al, 2002.)

could be brought to bear upon what heretofore had been a monopoly industry in Ontario. As specialized discussions on this issue unfolded – most importantly, in the form of the 1996 report of the Advisory Committee on Competition in Ontario's Electricity System (ACC, 1996) and the Government's own 'White Paper' on the issue in 1997 (Government of Ontario, 1997) – renewable electricity received only limited attention. The Advisory Committee's sole mention of it (amongst the more than 50 recommendations they advanced) was that there should be 'consideration of the most appropriate regulations or other instruments … to support … the introduction of renewable energy technologies' (ACC, 1996, vi). The White Paper, moreover, did not even suggest the possibility of using policy specifically to encourage renewable electricity. Instead, it argued that if Ontario customers wanted electricity generated by renewable resources, then they would choose it in the new electricity marketplace (Government of Ontario, 1997, 12). The legislation that followed the White Paper – the 1998 Energy Competition Act (Bill 35) – was entirely consistent with this line of reasoning.

While there were delays in opening the electricity market in Ontario (Trebilcock and Hrab, 2005), the Government continued to maintain that the introduction of competition and market forces was all that was needed to promote renewable electricity. In May 2000, the Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology's website responded to its self-declared question 'Are there any provisions in the legislation to support energy conservation and renewables?' in the following manner: 'The move to a competitive market will create more options for encouraging cleaner, more environmental friendly green technologies, energy conservation and "green power". ... As the competitive market develops, we expect that some customers will demonstrate their preferences to buy environmentally-sustainable energy, which will create opportunities for the renewable energy sector' (Government of Ontario, 2000). After the electricity market opened on 1 May 2002, members of the Government cited the construction of wind turbines in Toronto and Bruce County as evidence of the success of their policy (e.g., Dunlop, 2002).

Notwithstanding these comments, however, some subtle shifts in the Government's position were noticeable by 2002. Having appointed a multi-party 'Select Committee on Alternative Fuel Sources' on 28 June 2001, the Government received its report one year later. Although the Select Committee's final report restated the Government's position by arguing that the 'opening of the electricity market to competition ... will cause a range of renewable power

producers to come forward to meet market demand' (LAO, 2002, 15), it also supplemented this with a variety of additional policy recommendations. After considering the Select Committee's report, the Government pulled out 'renewable portfolio standards' for particular attention, with the Minister of Energy first asking his 'parliamentary assistant ... to consult with experts ... with a view to making recommendations for a renewable portfolio standard' (1 October 2002) (Baird, 2002), second committing to the development of a renewable portfolio standard in the Throne Speech (30 April 2003) (LAO, 2003), and third announcing its proposed 'Green Power Standard' (3 July 2003) (Government of Ontario, 2003a). Under the Green Power Standard, the Ontario Electricity Finance Corporation would manage a large-scale renewable portfolio standard. In 2006, 1 per cent of the province's electricity demand would be met by renewable resources; this would rise by 1 per cent a year to reach 8 per cent in 2013. Although the Government's defeat at the subsequent election (in October 2003) meant that it was never able to put these plans into action, the question that nevertheless still arises is: 'Why, after dismissing an renewable portfolio standard for so long, did the Progressive Conservative Government decide to propose one?' A focus upon the development of ideas, combined with an appreciation for timing, provides the explanation.

The Problem Stream

As a reminder, the problem stream is concerned with 'how problems come to be recognized and how conditions come to be defined as problems' (Kingdon, 2003, 19). By the mid-1990s, the 'problem' with Ontario's electricity system was primarily being defined in terms of cost. In 1906, the provincial electric utility, Ontario Hydro, was created in order to deliver 'power at cost' to the citizens of Ontario (Freeman, 1996). Blessed with abundant hydropower resources, that cost was, throughout most of the 20th century, quite low. Indeed, the low cost of electricity not only benefitted residential customers in the province, but it also served to provide many businesses with a significant competitive advantage. However, considerable cost overruns in nuclear power plant construction during the 1980s and early 1990s, coupled with lower than expected increases in electricity demand during the same period, meant that electricity prices in Ontario rose significantly during the early 1990s: 8.6 per cent in 1991, 11.8 per cent in 1992 and 7.9 per cent in 1993, 'at a time of severe recession in the province' (Daniels and Trebilcock, 1996, 4). Moreover, the rates being paid by customers did not reflect the total financial costs:

debt was accumulating at Ontario Hydro at a dramatic rate, reaching C$35 billion by the mid-1990s (Daniels and Trebilcock, 1996, 2).

The Progressive Conservative Government was happy to continue to present 'cost' as the 'problem' with the electricity system, for 'market discipline' (a policy consistent with their broader philosophical underpinnings outlined in the CSR) would thus appear to be an appropriate response. In support, advisors to the government on this issue were drawn from the ranks of those who shared this view – membership of the 1996 Advisory Committee, for example, was dominated by businesspeople

However, when the electricity problem is framed as a cost problem, renewable resources do not offer a solution. They are viewed – through traditional economic lens (not including, that is, many externalities) – as being more expensive than conventional electricity alternatives. Given the importance placed upon economic criteria – in particular, job creation[5] – the best response to the electricity problem was the one that would deliver electricity at the lowest cost possible so that businesses (many of them large users of electricity) could create jobs.

But the late 1990s saw another representation of the electricity problem arise. In this alternative explanation, the 'problem' with the provincial electricity system was that Ontario's coal-fired power plants were causing the province's air quality to deteriorate dramatically which, in turn, was causing illness and death among Ontario's citizens. Credit for the development of this new frame can be traced directly to the combined efforts of the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) and the Ontario Clean Air Alliance (OCAA).

In 1998, the OMA jumped into policy discussions on air quality by publishing a 'ground level ozone position paper' (OMA, 1998). In this, the OMA identified the health impacts of poor air quality, noting that children were particularly susceptible. The message was clear: air pollution was a 'serious health risk' (OMA, 1998). Moreover, the 'primary source' of the problem, as identified by this group of physicians, was the electricity sector in the province, particularly the coal-fired power stations (OMA, 1998). While this report stimulated debate, it was the OMA's 2000 report that had the greatest impact.

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[5] Worth noting here is subtitle of the Government's 1997 White Paper: 'Direction for change: Charting a course for competitive electricity and *jobs* in Ontario' (Government of Ontario, 1997, emphasis added). Furthermore, echoing the CSR, one interview respondent confirmed that any policy proposed during this period was screened against a key criterion: 'Would it be shown to create employment?'

In that year, the OMA released a report entitled ‘The Illness Costs of Air Pollution in Ontario’ (OMA, 2000a). With relatively little change in the atmospheric understandings and data used, this report took the findings a step further and considered the economic ramifications of poor air quality in the province. The press release accompanying the report declared that air pollution ‘will cost Ontario’s health-care system and economy more than [C]$1 billion and result in approximately 1,900 deaths this year’ (OMA, 2000b). The media caught hold of this, and dramatic headlines appeared across Ontario newspapers: ‘Smog costs to top [C]$1 billion, doctors warn – dirty air will kill 1,920’ (McAndrew, 2000, 1), ‘Pollution will kill 1,900 in province this year ... 47 million sick days’ (Prittie, 2000, A21) and ‘Smog costs us [C]$1.2 [billion] a year’ (Mcguinness, 2000, A01).

The OMA continued their campaign the following year with the observation that: ‘We are all breathing poisons in Ontario’s air’ (OMA, 2001, 2). During the summer of 2002, moreover, the OMA launched its ‘Smog-Wise Information Program’ (OMA, 2002). They drew attention to the ways in which children could be protected from poor air quality and again pointed an accusatory finger at the province’s coal-fired power plants. While their smog-season pronouncements certainly attracted attention, the OMA – representing a key set of professionals active in Ontario’s C$34 billion-a-year health care sector – not surprisingly had a broad range of issues to consider. As a result, the Association’s focus upon smog was only occasional. On its own, therefore, the OMA may not have been successful in challenging the dominant frame of ‘electricity as a cost problem’ and instead characterising it as a public health issue. For that, the contributions of the Ontario Clean Air Alliance (OCAA) were needed.

The OCAA was formed in August 1997, in anticipation of the introduction of competition in the electricity market and a concern that this could serve to increase the use of coal-fired power stations across Ontario. The Alliance called for an end to the use of coal in power stations in Ontario. From the start, human health concerns were front and centre in the OCAA’s messages, often complementing the OMA’s scientific analyses with their own economic studies. The OCAA was also particularly effective in getting the message out to the public and politicians: using a large network of local contacts across the province, the Alliance maintained an active electronic mail distribution list, submitted articles to local and regional newspapers and appeared before citizen groups and municipal councils.

This new representation of the electricity problem – that is, as a public health challenge – became part of the policy landscape through a combination of conscious strategizing and uncontrollable circumstances. The OMA recognized the importance of quantitative indicators – not only for assessing and communicating the 'magnitude of a problem', but also for increasing awareness of 'changes in the problem' (compare with Kingdon, 2003, 91; and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999, 124). The OCAA spread this message throughout the province. The 'feedback' (Kingdon, 2003, 100-03) they gave to the government was also influential: polls in 1999 and 2001 revealed that a majority of southern Ontario survey respondents wanted a phase-out of coal-fired power stations and were willing to pay more for their electricity in order to convert the coal-fired power stations to natural gas.[6] Ironically, it helped that poor air quality in Ontario – particularly in the province's major urban centres – was a problem, and that it was getting worse. As Table 2 reveals, the second half of the 1990s experienced, on average, four smog advisories a year covering just over eight days. While the year 2000 was below this average, 2001 was significantly above this average; moreover, 2002 saw an unprecedented number of 'smog days'. These served as 'focusing events' (Kingdon 2003, 94), with the province's coal-fired power stations being held culpable.

Table 2 – Smog advisories issued by the Ontario Ministry of Environment, 1995-2006

Year	Number of advisories	Total number of days
1993	1	1
1994	2	6
1995	6	14
1996	3	5
1997	3	6
1998	3	8
1999	5	9
2000	3	4
2001	7	23
2002	10	27
2003	7	19
2004	8	20
2005	15	53

Sources: Government of Ontario (2006a, 43), Government of Ontario (2006c) and Government of Ontario (2003a, 36).

[6] See the OCAA's polling work (OCAA, 2006). Noteworthy is that the OCAA always disaggregated polling results by respondents' voting intentions, perhaps to illuminate the fact that respondents of 'all political shades' supported these positions.

The Policy Stream

Turning to the second of Kingdon's three streams, consider the constituent elements of the 'policy primeval soup' during the mid-1990s. While there was certainly a lot of activity regarding policy proposals in Ontario's electricity system – given the fact that there were signs that unprecedented changes were soon to be forthcoming – the policy community was only modest in size. Moreover, most of the specialists in this policy area – that is, the government staff officials, the politicians, the academics and the interest group analysts – were not particularly interested in renewable electricity.

Civil servants and government members had no prompt from the CSR to consider renewable electricity. Moreover, what is sometimes overlooked is that the policy capacity of the key government bodies was quite modest: with only a limited number of staff focusing upon policy during the late 1990s, for example, one interview respondent reported that any 'extra' time available to civil servants in the Ministry of Energy was quickly consumed by the privatisation agenda. Outside of government, relatively few academics in Ontario were active in electricity issues; those who were tended to focus upon technical aspects while being based in engineering departments. The only think-tank in Ontario explicitly devoted to energy issues, Energy Probe, had a lead campaigner who was already positively-predisposed to the Government's approach.[7] Meanwhile, representatives of environmental organisations, many of whom fundamentally opposed the Government's core philosophy as articulated in the CSR, often had to balance the electricity file with their other responsibilities for climate change and/or air quality. And those organizations that had policy specialists devoted to electricity issues – for example, the Power Workers Union and the Association of Major Power Consumers of Ontario (representing large users of electricity in Ontario) – saw little benefit in investigating renewable electricity. Finally, while major law firms in Toronto were increasing the size of their 'energy groups', the policy approach of the Progressive Conservative Government during the mid- and late-1990s suggested that there would be few lucrative billing opportunities in the area of renewable electricity. As a result, the policy stream did not serve to generate significant new ideas during this period.

[7] Tom Adams of Energy Probe wrote, in a January 11, 2002 electronic posting (Adams, 2002), that: 'Government subsidies to solar and wind power production (as distinct from research), whether in the form of net billing for transmission and distribution services, renewable portfolio standards (RPS), production tax credits, production bounties, non-fossil fuel obligations, or any other such schemes, should be cut off immediately. Such subsidies discourage success.' (quoted in Swift and Stewart, 2004, 227).

Indeed, the only place where some policy discussion with direct consequences for renewable electricity was taking place was the Market Design Committee (MDC). Formed in 1998, the MDC was charged with advising the Ontario Government as to how its new electricity system should be developed – that is, in taking the general principles of the Energy Competition Act and translating them into an electricity system that would reflect those values and priorities. Noteworthy for our consideration of renewable electricity, there was debate regarding the appropriate role of environmental goals in the new electricity marketplace.

On this issue, there were two dominant views in the MDC. On the one hand, a number of members argued that the electricity system's potential environmental problems – for example, emissions of pollutants like sulphur dioxide – should be addressed head-on through some kind of emission restriction obligations at the power plants. This was a traditional 'regulatory' approach, the kind of which had been common in addressing Ontario's environmental challenges since the 1960s (Howlett, 2002; see, also, Table 1); the innovation was the addition of a 'cap and trade' system (OMDC, 1999, p. 7-1). Proponents of this position within the MDC were supported by external contributions by groups like the Ontario Clean Air Alliance (Crone, 1998). On the other hand, a number of other members argued that renewable resources for electricity generation should explicitly be encouraged through a renewable portfolio standard (RPS), with much of their inspiration drawn from what was going on in the United States. Support for this position was forthcoming from some business representatives both inside and outside the Committee: Stephen Probyn (e.g., Probyn, 1996, 11) – a financier with long-standing links to various conservative parties[8] -- and the Independent Power Producers' Society of Ontario,[9] for example, both called for an RPS.

Because the Government's White Paper on electricity had demonstrated no interest in an RPS, it was generally accepted that 'significant support' among Committee members for such a policy would have to be in place before the MDC could endorse it. That, according to one interview respondent, did not exist. Instead, the MDC concluded, on balance, that 'the market should be as level a playing field as possible. If government wishes to provide such subsidies as a matter of public policy, then there are other ways of doing so.' (Grant, 2002, 61) Although

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[8] Probyn was a senior energy advisor in the federal government of Prime Minster Brian Mulroney in the 1980s (Westell, 1986) and ran, federally, for the Progressive Conservative Party in Rosedale in 1997 (Weil, 2000).
[9] See the comments of the President of the Independent Power Producers' Society of Ontario, Al Barnstaple, in late 1998 (quoted in Platts, 1998, 9).

support for an RPS was not sufficiently strong at this time so as to be part of the MDC's recommendations, it is important to recognize that the RPS made an appearance in the policy stream at this time.

The Political Stream

Following Kingdon (2003), I use the term 'political' as a window through which events beyond the confines of the particular issue under investigation can be examined. In this particular case-study, the 'public mood' in Ontario was especially influential.

It is widely accepted that the CSR 'struck a chord' with many people in Ontario during the mid-1990s. Notwithstanding the way in which it served to polarize politics in the province to an unprecedented degree, the Progressive Conservative Government still felt, during the late 1990s, that the general approach laid out in that document was still supported by a significant portion of the population. As such, their approach to renewable electricity – letting market forces determine the extent to which it would be a part of the Ontario electricity system – was in step with this public mood.

This public mood, however, began to shift significantly on 12 May 2000. On that day, e. coli bacteria entered the drinking water system in Walkerton, Ontario, a small farming community located approximately 150 kilometres north-west of Toronto. Of the town's 4,800 residents, 2,300 subsequently became ill and seven died. According to the subsequent public investigation into the tragedy, '[s]ome people, particularly children, may endure lasting effects' (O'Connor, 2002, 3). Significant for this article is that the cause of this tragedy was at least partially linked to the government's environmental policies. Since coming to office in 1995, not only had the environment been a relatively low priority for the Progressive Conservative Government (it, for instance, received no attention in the CSR), environmental programs were often seen to be part of the problem. Fewer environmental regulations were thought to be good for business, and thus good for employment and good for the province as a whole. As a result, the Environment Ministry's operating budget was cut by 42 per cent between 1994 and 2000, and hundreds of employees were laid off (Gallon, 2000). While this served to catalyze pockets of protest, the Walkerton tragedy effectively turned the mood of the wider public. Not only were Walkerton residents enraged – heckling the Premier when he visited the community soon after the tragedy came to light (Alphonso and Bourette, 2000) – and political opponents holding the

cabinet responsible (Mackie, Bourette and Alphonso, 2000), but the public at large also thought that the Progressive Conservative Government shared at least some of the blame for the tragedy. The importance of 'the environment' was rising up the public agenda in Ontario, while the popularity of the government was falling.[10] (See polls quoted in Mackie, 2000; and Mallan, 2000.)

The Policy Window Opens

When the three separate streams described above come together and are coupled, there are opportunities for action. These fleeting periods are times during which 'policy windows' are open. In the more colloquial parlance of participants, this is when the issue is 'really getting hot' or when 'the stars [are] right' (quoted in Kingdon, 2003, 166). Policy entrepreneurs – that is, those who are 'advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea' (Kingdon, 2003, 122) – are often the ones who see the open policy window and who rush to take advantage of it.

The policy window on renewable electricity began to open in 2000, prompted by changes in the political stream. Any new environmental challenge in Ontario that emerged after May 2000 immediately adopted greater salience as a result of the Walkerton tragedy. Politically, the official opposition in the Ontario legislature, the Liberal Party, was pushing the environmental agenda across a variety of issues, electricity included. This culminated in their declaration, on 9 September 2002, that they would close all of Ontario's coal-fired power stations by the year 2007 once they came to power. This was an unprecedented announcement, for just three months earlier, the Select Committee's unanimously-adopted report (on which there had been representatives from all three major political parties in Ontario) called for the closures of these stations by 2015 (LAO, 2002, 16). While the Government ridiculed the Liberal Party's proposal, calling it 'patently absurd' (Benzie, 2002), it clearly had a political impact: the proverbial bar had seen to be set, at least as perceived by the 'public mood', by the brazen Liberal Party declaration.

Thus, when the electricity problem – as increasingly represented as a public health challenge – intensified during the summers of 2002 and 2003, it could not be ignored. In short, the Government felt that it had to do something. That something was to look to the policy stream

[10] Indeed, Pal (2001) identifies Walkerton as a key 'focusing event' (following Kingdon) – that is, a sudden catastrophe or crisis that grabs attention.

for alternatives. Another regulatory measure – beyond, that is, their confirmation in the April 2003 Throne Speech to accept the Select Committee's 2015 coal phaseout recommendation (LAO, 2003) – was not politically possible. It was clear that the business community (particularly the Association of Major Power Consumers of Ontario) – still a key Government constituency – would not support such a move, for fear of the consequences that it would have upon electricity prices. What the Government was therefore left with in the policy stream was, from the Market Design Committee's discussions, the RPS option. Politically, this was seen as more acceptable to the Progressive Conservative Government because an RPS could, after all, be sold as a market approach: renewable energy developers would 'compete' against each other, with the business going to those who could offer the good at the lowest price. Furthermore, the additional costs were thought to be manageable.

The policy entrepreneur who effectively coupled the streams was Steve Gilchrist. A Progressive Conservative member of provincial parliament (and former cabinet minister), Gilchrist had long-standing interests in renewable energy, which, unusually for a member of the Government, were accepted as genuine, even by those fundamentally opposed to the CSR. (He was certainly 'well-connected and persistent' (Zahariadis, 1996, 404), being identified as one who knows 'what buttons to push to get things done inside the government' (Urquart, 2003, p. A15).) Through his work on the Select Committee and after his appointment as Commissioner of Alternative Energy in late 2002, he continued to lobby, both inside and outside the government, for more action on renewable electricity. His efforts bore fruit in the summer of 2003, when he was able to announce, in downtown Toronto, the introduction of a new Green Power Standard (Government of Ontario, 2003b).[11] His comments – in particular, his remarks that 'clean, green energy ... would go a long way to helping protect our environment and reducing the number of smog days' (quoted in Mittelstaedt, 2003, A6) – highlight the aforementioned developments in the political stream; the setting – downtown Toronto with ozone levels hitting 115 ppb on the day[12] – reinforce the particular problem definition emerging from the problem stream; and his solution – the Green Power Standard – was picked from the policy stream.

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[11] A number of other recommendations from the Select Committee's 2002 report were also adopted by the Government.

[12] Reading at 1500 (EDT) on 3 July 2003 at the Bay/Wellesley monitoring station (Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Air Quality Index Historical Data).

The Liberal Government's Policy on Renewable Electricity from 2003 to 2006

In October 2003, the Liberal Party won a majority of seats in the Ontario Legislature. As part of their election campaign – and as already noted above – the Liberals had promised to close the province's coal-fired power stations by 2007. Additionally, they had committed to developing 5 per cent of the province's electricity capacity (generally taken to be 1,350 MW) through renewable electricity by 2007, and 10 per cent by 2010 (Ontario Liberal Party, 2003, 3-4).

They began to act on these promises in April 2004 by initiating a call for proposals for 300 MW of new renewable energy supply.[13] This was followed, on 24 June 2004, by the formal issuing of the Request for Proposals (RfP) for 300 MW of renewable energy capacity (to be available by 2007, at the latest). In all, 41 proposals – representing approximately 1,100 MW of capacity from wind, biomass and waterpower – were offered. With selection based primarily upon cost considerations, 10 projects – totalling 395 MW of capacity – were selected, with the announcement being made on 24 November 2004. (This is also known as a 'bidding system'. See Table 1.)

The RfP approach continued in 2005, with a second call issued in the early part of that year. Looking for almost 1,000 MW of capacity, nine projects, totalling 975 MW, were selected later that same year. While a third RfP was initiated in 2005 – this time aiming for up to 200 MW of renewable energy supply to be provided through smaller-scale generating facilities (with a rated capacity between 250 kW and 19.99 MW, inclusive) – the deadline initially set for the submission of proposals was delayed indefinitely. As of August 2006, the process continued to be 'on hold'.

Nevertheless, the predominant approach to renewable electricity in Ontario under the Liberal Government has been through the RfP process. While distinct from an RPS (see Table 1), there are similarities – most importantly, renewable electricity suppliers are in competition with each other in order to secure markets for their products. Ontario's RfP effectively adapted the RPS approach that continues to prevail in the United States. While most states in the United States are dominated by a small number of utilities, Ontario had, in 2003, over 100 local electric distribution companies. Some, like Toronto Hydro and Hydro Ottawa, were relatively large, with staff numbers in the hundreds and annual revenues in the tens of millions of dollars. Others, like Festival Hydro and West Perth Power in southwestern Ontario, were quite small, with limited

[13] All information regarding the RfPs is taken from the website: www.ontarioelectricityrfp.ca

personnel and few discretionary financial resources. While the former might have been able to implement a traditional RPS at the local level (by, for example, implementing a system to procure and deliver a predetermined share of their electricity supply from renewable resources), the latter would have found it to be much more challenging. Moreover, as one interview respondent put it: ‘The Ontario bureaucracy was already well-experienced and proficient in government procurement through the RfP process. Renewable electricity would simply be another commodity sourced in this way.’ As such, it ‘fit’ with the province’s already-existing standard operating procedures.

Notwithstanding the predominance of this approach, another policy possibility started to appear in 2004. The Government, towards the end of that year, commissioned a report on ‘feed-in tariffs’. (See Table 1 for a definition.) The Government received this report in May 2005 (Smith, 2005) and made it public in August 2005. Upon doing so, the Energy Minister indicated his commitment to what, by then, had come to be called ‘standard offer contracts’ (Hamilton, 2005).[14] He instructed the Ontario Power Authority (OPA) to ‘investigate a workable pricing scheme’ and the Ontario Energy Board to ‘look at necessary connection-policy changes that would ensure non-discriminatory access to the grid’ (Hamilton, 2005). Stakeholder discussions, largely facilitated by the OPA, continued through the rest of 2005 and into 2006. On 21 March 2006, the Liberal Government announced its commitment to this approach for the development of renewable electricity. Although this policy has yet to be implemented (at the time of this writing, August 2006), two questions from the Liberal Government’s actions on renewable electricity nevertheless still arise: ‘First, why did the Liberal Government pursue an RfP approach after being elected in 2003?’ and ‘Second, why did the Liberal Government buck the North American trend and eventually decide to pursue feed-in tariffs as well?’ Again, a focus upon the development of ideas, combined with an appreciation for timing, provides the explanation.

The Problem Stream

While it is argued above that the electricity problem, at the time of the Liberals’ election victory, was predominantly framed as either a ‘cost problem’ or a ‘public health problem’, there was

[14] On the importance in the move from the term that had been usually used in the Ontario debate to that time – ‘advanced renewable tariffs’ – to the term adopted by the Ontario government – ‘standard offer contracts’ – see Gipe (2006).

already emerging another narrative regarding the challenges facing Ontario's electricity system – namely, that it was an 'adequate capacity (or supply) problem'.

Ironically, the successful ascension of the 'public health' description – and political commitment by the Liberals on the same – meant that attention was focused upon how that 6,000 MW of capacity provided by the province's coal-fired power plants would be replaced. This was already on the agenda before the Liberals' election victory in October 2003, with the blackout of August 2003 – a time at which most of Ontario's 12.6 million citizens were without power – serving to draw additional attention to this understanding of the electricity problem.

Reports emerging from eminent committees were also highlighting the so-called 'supply gap'. The Electricity Conservation and Supply Task Force, which had been appointed by the former Progressive Conservative Government on 27 June 2003 and had been asked by the new Liberal Government to continue its work, presented its report to the Minister of Energy on 9 January 2004. The problem, as perceived by the Task Force members, was put front and centre in the title of their report: 'Tough Choices: Addressing Ontario's *Power Needs*' (ECSTF, 2004, emphasis added). The first sentence of the report further reinforced this message: 'Ontario faces a looming electricity supply shortfall in the years ahead as coal-fired generation is taken out of service and existing nuclear power plants approach the end of their planned operating lives' (ECSTF, 2004, 1). Similar sentiments were advanced by the three-person Ontario Power Generation Review Committee, for they introduced their report by observing that: 'Ontario's electricity system is increasingly fragile. On the hottest and coldest days, people worry if there will be enough power' (OPGRC, 2004, 2). Thus 'capacity' was often advanced as the key 'electricity problem' in Ontario.

By 2004, however, yet another depiction of the electricity problem was being presented in Ontario. Led by the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association (OSEA) – a nongovernmental organisation formed in 1999 to implement community sustainable energy projects across Ontario – the electricity problem in the province was often conceptualized in terms of how the benefits of economic development were distributed: they could either be sent outside the province, in terms of paying others for either the fuel (particularly natural gas) for power stations, or for the electricity itself (through imports); or they could be captured by those in the province through the provision of value-added activities within Ontario's borders. The latter would serve to advance

provincial economic development (often represented in terms of 'local' or 'community' economic development), while the former would not.

Throughout 2004, OSEA participated in a number of meetings across the province to advance this message. Over 900 people, for example, attended a meeting in Mississauga, Ontario on 5 March 2004. Meetings in the farming community of Stratford, Ontario (1 April 2004) and the mid-sized city of Peterborough, Ontario (6 April 2004) were also extremely successful. At all such meetings, and in many communications being developed at this time (for example, press releases and op-eds), the 'whose economic development' question was being posed. OSEA talked of 'dollars that would stay in the province, benefiting all of Ontario, not dollars exported outside the province to pay for imported coal or natural gas' (Gipe, 2004a). The Association argued that billions of dollars would be pumped into the province, spurring, in particular, 'a rural economic revival' (Gipe, 2004a). Lest urbanites feel left out, mention was also made of 'new manufacturing jobs' (Gipe, 2004b). Invoking the vision of Ontario Hydro's founder, Sir Adam Beck, there was a call to return to the days when 'electricity was an engine of economic development' (Gipe, 2004b). While these comments are not meant to suggest that this was the first time that anyone had conceived of the 'electricity problem' in Ontario as one of local economic development – indeed, others had done it in the past -- instead, they are meant to draw attention to the extent to which it was being done. While these other conceptualisations of the problem – as 'cost', as 'public health', as 'capacity' (and others) – persisted, they were joined by a new image of the electricity problem as one of economic development.

The Policy Stream

When the Liberals formed the government in October 2003, the policy stream in Ontario was dominated by discussions about the RPS (and, as subsequently adapted for the Ontario situation, the RfP). That changed in February 2004, when the aforementioned OSEA hired a California wind-expert, Paul Gipe, as its interim Executive Director (to replace Deborah Doncaster, who had gone on maternity leave). Soon after his appointment, Gipe launched OSEA's campaign for Advanced Renewable Tariffs. Largely unknown on this side of the Atlantic Ocean at the time (where it was generally assumed that RPS would continue to dominate North American discussions (Rowlands, 2005)), OSEA was introducing an entirely new concept into the policy stream.

Supporting the introduction of this new idea into the policy discussions was a report by the David Suzuki Foundation, a nongovernmental environmental organisation. Released in 2004, the report called for the introduction of feed-in tariffs, or, as they called them, 'renewable energy mechanisms' (DSF, 2004, 10). Also important was that this report contributed real, tangible numbers regarding the potential of renewable electricity in Ontario to the 'policy primeval soup'. Over 35,000 GWhr a year of renewable electricity (through biomass, wind, low-impact hydropower and solar photovoltaic) were explicitly identified (DSF, 2004). (This compares with an Ontario average annual consumption of approximately 155,000 GWhr.)

The Political Stream

At the October 2003 election, the Ontario Liberals were given a significant mandate: not only did they secure a majority of the seats in the legislature, but their share of the popular vote (46.5%) was extremely high, surpassing even that achieved by the Progressive Conservative Party in their 1995 electoral victory (44.8%). This was interpretted as a message to do things differently than the former government, and they aimed to do so. Indeed, this sentiment helps to explain why the Progressive Conservative Government's 'Green Power Standard' was not adopted by the Liberals. While the goals of the Liberals' RfP were similar to those of the Progressive Conservatives' Green Power Standard, and while both were basically derived from a US-inspired RPS, many of the details were certainly different. Not only was the name changed, but the Liberals' movement towards a RfP also served to provide a solution that better matched the perceived problem: through the RfP process, successful bids could more easily be presented as means of 'closing the supply gap'. Moreover, the RfP generally started well: the bids were 'over-subscribed' and the winning prices were lower than generally expected (e.g, Campbell, 2004). Bullish feelings about the RfP, however, soon began to dissipate.

After the announcement of the first round of successful bids, the media revealed that one of the successful applicants had close links to the Liberal Party. Mike Crawley, president of AIM PowerGen Corporation, whose company was awarded a long-term contract to build the 99 MW Erie Shores Wind Farm, was President of the Ontario wing of the federal Liberal Party and had once been executive assistant to former provincial Liberal Party leader Lyn McLeod (e.g., Greenberg, 2004, A11). Given the previous government's close energy links with industry – not only the fact that an old friend of Premier Mike Harris's, William Farlinger, was appointed

Chairman of Ontario Hydro in 1995, but also that former Minister of Energy Chris Stockwell had to resign his cabinet post (Environment Minister) in June 2003 because of accusations that he billed up to C$10,000 in expenses to Ontario Power Generation during a European business trip with his family – a re-emergence of 'cronyism' did not fit with the Liberals' plan to be distinctive.

Second, it eventually became clear that the RfPs' successful projects may not be constructed as quickly as originally envisaged. For one, the price of steel – pivotal in the overall capital cost of wind turbines – rose dramatically during this period, from US$115 per ton in 2003 to US$198 per ton in 2005 (EDC, 2006). As a result, what appeared to be lucrative payments to developers in 2003 suddenly looked less attractive just two years later.

Moreover, notwithstanding public support for renewables generally, and wind power in particular, NIMBYism (that is, 'not in my backyard') was arising once general aims developed into specific plans. Most significantly, residents near Collingwood, Ontario organized effectively to oppose the development of the 49.5 MW Blue Highlands Wind Farm (which had been successful in the first RfP).

Finally, it was clear that as well as winners, there were also losers in the RfP process – that is, entrepreneurs who were not chosen and may therefore not end up being supportive of the ruling government. Additionally, it was increasingly appearing that one industry was receiving the vast majority of the benefits: more than 95 per cent of the contracts (in terms of capacity) went to wind power developments. Renewable electricity was thus beginning to be seen to be redefined as wind electricity. Therefore, for a variety of 'political reasons', the attraction of the RfP process was diminishing.

The Policy Window Opens

A second policy window in renewable electricity in Ontario began to open in 2004, again when developments in the political stream catalyzed change. More specifically, the Liberal Government's desire to 'be seen to be different' than the previous Progressive Conservative Government – all the more important, politically, as a quagmire developed around the RfP process – encouraged it to be more receptive to developments in the policy and problem streams. As we have seen above, the policy stream was offering advanced renewable tariffs as an 'answer' to a new problem that was emerging – namely, who would get the 'economic

development benefits' from increased activity in the electricity industry.[15] The coupling of this policy with this problem helped to address the Liberal Government's difficulties in the political stream: not only were feed-in tariffs 'different', but they were offering benefits to, potentially, millions of people across Ontario. Unlike an RPS (or RfP), there are no 'losers' with feed-in tariffs,[16] for you are only 'competing against yourself' (that is, if you can build your renewable energy facility, you can reap the financial benefits, regardless of what anyone else in the province may do). The potential to have numerous voters – particularly valuable rural voters – appreciative of the ruling Liberal Government was appealing.

While that describes how the streams were coupled, the analysis would not be complete without a consideration of the role of a key political entrepreneur in the process – namely, Paul Gipe.

Alternatively described by interviewees as 'adept at bringing different people together to talk', 'media-savvy', 'one who knows how to push political triggers' and 'professorial', virtually all credit Gipe with a key role. Like a textbook political entrepreneur, Gipe looked for key allies, made connections, was persistent and advanced his case consistently. Here, I highlight some of the most significant activities.

Engaging the province's farming community was critical. In his speeches to rural communities, Gipe presented wind power to Ontario's farmers as a potentially-lucrative 'cash crop' (Hulet, 2004). The use of a farming metaphor gave his argument greater normative force, for it conjured up 'certain purposes and values, certain normative images, that have long been powerful in [that] culture' (Schön and Rein, 1994, 27). The same was done with the written word. In a major op-ed piece in *The Toronto Star*, Gipe argued that ' ... Ontario farmers could spin profits from the wind, ... Ontario farmers could earn billions in new revenue, helping them to stay on the land and do what they do best.' (Gipe, 2004a). The message was clear: instead of having to work through a middle-men in the RfP process, you could participate directly in the marketplace with feed-in tariffs; instead of receiving approximately C$5,000 per turbine on your

[15] Note the close relationship between developments in these two streams. Indeed, it could be argued that, in the minds of some, there was an 'answer' (advanced renewable tariffs) that was looking for a 'question' (which turned out to be 'whose economic development?'). By contrast, when the first policy window opened, the 'problem' (that is, smog) certainly led the 'policy' (which turned out to be RPS).
[16] Critics maintain that all taxpayers or ratepayers end up being losers, by virtue of supporting what they see to be unnecessarily high payments to renewable energy users through increased rates on all electricity.

land from a major corporation,[17] you could get 30 times that much by owning it yourself[18] While there was certainly risk involved, there was also the potential for great reward.[19]

In October 2004, OSEA – with the David Suzuki Foundation – held a forum on ARTs in Toronto in order to push the agenda forward. It was well-attended, with over 100 people present. Inviting renowned renewable energy advocate and German politician Hermann Scheer to speak about the benefits of advanced renewable tariffs lent international credibility to the campaign. Highlighting the role of Prince Edward Island – and its efforts to become a key 'renewable energy hub' in Canada – set up intra-provincial rivalries to encourage Ontario to take action. Indeed, an interview respondent argued that it was particularly noteworthy that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy stayed for the entire day's proceedings.

Finally, Gipe was adept at both the 'hard' and 'soft' skills useful in putting the case forward. He had a long background in renewable energy (particularly wind energy), which not only gave him great credibility when talking about the subject, but also a deep network of contacts upon which to draw. He was also, as noted above, proficient at nurturing relationships and dealing with others, either individually or in large groups. One interview respondent quoted, almost verbatim, the following old management adage to describe Gipe: 'Advance your position, and make them think that it was their idea.'

Gipe's efforts bore fruit in the spring of 2006, when he was able to listen to an announcement, in Cambridge, Ontario, about Advanced Renewable Tariffs. The speeches at that time – made with blue-collar workers from Photowatt Technologies, a photvoltaic panel manufacturer, smiling in the background – had economic development as a key theme ('spur ... innovation', 'create jobs', contribute to our long-term prosperity', 'a whole new revenue stream' (Government of Ontario, 2006b)). Developments in the political stream had encouraged both this representation of the challenge (developed in the problem stream) and standard offer contracts (developed in the policy stream) as the solution.

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[17] This estimate is following references to revenues of about '[C]$4,000 to [C]$6,000 a year per turbine', with no size of turbine noted (Livingston, 2004) and an 'annual payout of at least [C]$5,000 per turbine' for a farmer on the shore of Lake Erie (Karleff, 2004).

[18] A figure of C$150,000 is given in OSEA (2004a).

[19] The messaging to farmers was frank and direct. See, for example, OSEA (2004b). Indeed, the fact that the message about advanced renewable tariffs was sent (at least partially) to the Cabinet from the party's grassroots (as evidenced by, for example, the Liberal party resolution on the same at its November 2004 policy conference in Huntsville, Ontario) provides further support for this argument.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to examine the evolution of renewable electricity policy in the province of Ontario (Canada). Attention to the importance of 'ideas' and 'timing' – structured by means of a 'multiple streams approach' – helps to explain two significant shifts in Ontario's policy. The first, occurring in 2003, involved a rejection of markets as the sole mechanism to promote increased uptake of electricity from solar, wind, biomass and small hydropower sources. Instead, a large-scale renewable portfolio standard was to be the preferred means. The second, occurring in 2006, involved an extension of then-existing policy: the bidding system (known as 'request for proposals' in the Ontario context) would be supplemented by a feed-in tariff. In each case, the shift in policy was catalyzed by a key political entrepreneur.

Policy debates in Ontario regarding the promotion of renewable electricity continue. Indeed, the ways in which the details of the standard offer contract are formalized by the Ontario Power Authority (and other bodies) will be critical, for full operationalization has yet to be realized. (For the discussion surrounding solar photovoltaics, for example, see Hamilton, 2006.) Indeed, debate regarding electricity more broadly in Ontario continues to be lively, with the Ontario Power Authority's *Supply Mix Advice Report* (OPA, 2005) generating much controversy; its *Integrated Power System Plan* – scheduled to be finalized by March 2007 – may well do the same. This article has suggested that a multiple streams approach, with a particular appreciation for the role of ideas, may help to make sense of the continued evolution of policy in Ontario, especially when it involves renewable resources.

Indeed, the success of this exploratory research encourages these frameworks to continue to be used as heuristics in order to improve our understanding of policy-making – particularly at the problem definition and agenda-setting stages. Given that this was a case-study of the 'least-likely' variety (Zahariadis, 1996, 401) – that is, it focused upon policy-making in a Westminster, rather than a Washington, system of government – it offered additional support for the use of the multiple streams approach, in particular, in analysis. With sustainability in electricity systems around the world continuing to be a goal, rather than a reality, tools that increase our understanding of the dynamics of decision-making are surely welcomed.

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