

Nick Doe, *Hydro: supply must increase or demand must fall*, Flying Shingle, p.6, November 21, 2011.

Dear Editor

I'm surprised that I rattled Jean McLaren's cage (Shingle, Nov. 14, p.4) if only because I hadn't noticed that that feisty lady was in one.

All I can say is that I hope she didn't try to save money by sending her letter by email instead of by Canada Post; doing the former would of course have been contributing to the ongoing loss of post office jobs. And her saving power during times of peak demand is commendable; it's good that with a smart meter installed, BC Hydro might in future be able to reward her with lower rates for doing so.

It's time that Burt Fidler's assertion (Shingle, Nov. 14, p.5) that smart meters can be "easily hacked" was backed up with some evidence. I'm concerned because ATMs (automated teller machines) use the same security standards. But I guess some smart meter opponents don't use ATMs on account of the loss of jobs at the banks.

Letting more water through the dams to meet peak demand, as also recommended by Michael Mehta (Nov. 7, p.8), doesn't work. If it did, BC Hydro would do it. Gabriola provides an excellent example of some of the problems of meeting peak demand. On cold winter afternoons, the amount of power BC Hydro can supply [to Gabriola Island] is limited by how hot the cable across the Northumberland Channel gets, not by how much water is flowing out of some far-away dam. In any serious analysis, you can't also ignore the fact that drawing down water levels in dams puts future supply at risk when only low in-flows are in the forecast.

Increasing the capacity of the system to meet peak demand not only costs money; it's bad for the environment. For just one example of this, let's take the power generated versus power consumed figures for 2010. In that year, BC Hydro supplied consumers 50233 GWh (gigawatt-hours) of energy and in doing so used 4840 GWh themselves for a total of 55073 GWh. Of this, 43755 GWh was supplied from BC Hydro's hydro and thermal plants. There was a lot of selling and buying of energy that I won't list here, but the bottom line is, after all the horse trading is accounted for, there was a shortfall of 11318 GWh. Where did that extra energy come from? Probably from some coal- or oil-fired power stations in Alberta or the USA. And it was probably expensive.

I agree that some of these imports might have been unnecessary with different management priorities—peak demand of 9847 MW (megawatts) was 11 per cent less than the installed capacity of 11073 MW (after allowing for lack of availability), but this is so because some large customers already have load-curtailement contracts and they shed 2 per cent of the load; and the weather was mild. And yes I know, I'm not factoring in the Columbia River Entitlements, but readers don't have endless patience with facts that don't accord with their opinions.

To bring the problem closer to home, in the years 2001–8, Gabriola's annual population increase, as measured by the number of BC Hydro residential customers, increased by 2.4 per cent, yet the annual demand for electrical energy (GWh/year) by residents increased by 3.7 per cent. If things are looking rosy right now, they pretty soon won't be if increasing numbers of consumers are not persuaded to moderate their increasing demands. Meeting peak demand costs money, and you

don't avoid paying those costs by not having time-of-use tariffs, unless, that is, you are prepared to put up with involuntary load shedding in the form of power cuts.

I'll pass on the petulance and the them-and-us paranoia in other letters. I have to admit though I find the cost: benefit analysis BC Hydro uses a problem.

I'm quite happy at the prospect of not having to subsidize BC's illegal drug trade, but I guess not everyone cares that much.

Sincerely
Nick Doe. ◇