

CONGO ← A1

The country has been wracked by a civil war since the mid 1990s, mainly in its e

to Kinshasa, where he met with political and religious figures, as well as opposition leaders.

"I must say, from the outset, that the Congolese authorities seemed open

government of Kinshasa needs to do."

Valcourt said Canada is making an effort to take a stand, but boycotting the summit is not the way to help the Congolese people.

improve the situation."

But MweneNgabo said he was surprised Canada seems unwilling to take a stand. "No one should show tacit support to the government of Joseph Kabila, a government which is oppres-

with only 59 fires burning a total of 37 hectares.

Crime

Purse snatcher gets five years

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# NB Power should seek more input from public: prof

JOHN CHILIBECK  
LEGISLATURE BUREAU

NB Power needs to do a much better job engaging the public, says a Fredericton professor.

Tom Beckley, who teaches the social dimensions of natural resource management at the University of New Brunswick, is part of a Canadian team that's been awarded a \$380,000 grant to do a comparative study of citizen engagement on electrical utilities.

He plans on using his end of the research to ask New Brunswickers which direction they think their publicly owned corporation should go.

"Given that just about everybody in New Brunswick is a customer and shareholder in NB Power, and the utility is doing potentially risky investments, I think there is a responsibility for it to be more accountable to the citizenry."

NB Power did not immediately respond to interview requests.

Beckley first noticed what he calls the disconnect between policy-makers and the public on NB Power when Shawn Graham's Liberal government proposed selling the utility to Hydro-Québec. The controversial deal was announced in October 2009 and collapsed several months later.

NB Power has since been given a new mandate letter from David Alward's Tory government and has come up with a 30-year strategic plan that includes becoming a top utility performer, cutting debt and convincing people and industry to use less electricity, especially during peak times. The utility has a \$5-billion debt and 13 aging generating stations.

PLEASE SEE → POWER, A2

## Recruiting a number of everyday citizens for a jury a possibility, professor says

POWER ← A1

Beckley likes many parts of the new strategic plan but notes that people weren't asked for their feedback before it was developed, even though they're the ones paying power bills each month.

This follows a long-held pattern, he says, pointing to the decision in 2005 to refurbish the Point Lepreau nuclear plant, which is \$1 billion over budget and three years behind schedule. The public was never asked if it wanted to keep nuclear energy.

"The new strategy doesn't pay a whole lot of attention to trying to engage more

dialogue, particularly with trying to change consumer behaviour around energy use," Beckley said. "They need to get those messages to the public, increasing energy literacy."

Two other professors will be involved in the four-year study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada: Dalhousie University professor Kate Sherren - originally from Nackawic - and the University of Alberta's John Parkins. They'll be supported by a number of research students at the three universities.

While much of the research will involve citizen engagement and utilities in different jurisdictions, Beckley hopes to

work with NB Power to find out what citizens in New Brunswick actually want.

There are a number of tools the research team could use. Beckley says it will first need to assess the base level of energy literacy in the province. This could be tricky, he concedes, because surveys need to be developed at a level that most people can understand and keep them interested enough to complete them. Energy issues are notoriously complex.

There could also be focus groups and workshops, similar to what was done to develop New Brunswick's poverty reduction plan in 2009, a document that won support from both parties in the

legislature and many businesses and community groups.

One possibility that intrigues Beckley is the idea of setting up a citizen jury, a tool that was used in Australia as the country grappled with issues as diverse as aboriginal relations and whether or not to remain part of the British monarchy.

Citizen juries involve recruiting a number of everyday citizens who hear from a number of experts with different viewpoints on a particular subject over several days.

After the sessions are completed, the jury has the right to hear from expert witnesses again to ask further questions until it reaches a decision.

In NB Power's case, it could give recommendations on what kind of plants it should build in the future.

Beckley said even though the recommendations wouldn't be binding, the results could be a little scary for technocrats and politicians who usually make all the decisions.

"We assume on an issue like this where it's technically complex that the public is ignorant. But if you were able to give a crash course to the public - and the 12 or 20 people on the citizen jury are seen to be representative of the public - and give them a greater level of knowledge, would their policy preferences be different than what they are today?"

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