

July 24, 2014

Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board

In the matter of the Public Utilities Act Matter Number M06321

And

In the Matter of a Review of Nova Scotia Power Incorporated's state of preparedness and response to post-tropical storm Arthur – July 2014

Letter of Comment prepared by Richard Plett

Dear Interested Parties,

On either Sunday March 1, 2009 or Monday March 2, 2009 and as reported in the Amherst Daily News on Thursday March 5, 2009 parts of Cumberland County experienced an ice storm the likes of which had not been seen in these parts for half a century. (can supply a copy of the article if needed) Just as reports I have read about Arthur during that power outage resulting from the ice storm in 2009 Nova Scotia Powers' outage line was completely inaccurate, they kept moving the time for power restoration back about every six hours. Now I and many others at the time believed their estimations and made decisions based on them. I lost complete faith in their estimations the 2<sup>nd</sup> night of the outage. I called Nova Scotia Powers' outage information line determined to get a true and accurate time of when power would be restored or an admission that they really had no clue of when that would happen. This was done about 11:30 PM. I blasted them (without using any profanity) and from what I recall stated that they needed to provide people with true and accurate information and if they did not know they should tell people that they just do not know when power will be restored, from memory I believe I did this well enough to be passed to a supervisor or a supervisor returned my call. I again repeated that people needed to be told true and accurate information and if Nova Scotia Power did not have that, that they should actually tell people that they do not know with any certainty of when their power will be restored. From memory I told them people actually make decisions on the information that they provide and it needed to as true and accurate as possible. (I can supply the location and number this or these calls were made from or to if needed as I believe Nova Scotia Power records all calls, just not sure how long they actually save them for) This to me I would equate to an adult scolding a child for behaving very badly and attempting to get them to change their very bad behavior. I did check back shortly with Nova Scotia Powers' automated power outage information line and the message they had on it then was much more accurate than what they had on it previously the last 24 hours. The purpose of the above paragraph is to advise the Board that this is not a new problem for Nova Scotia Power. Also should mention the phone lines from my own memory were actually down for a bit during the ice storm. Also of note and again from my memory in Baie Verte, New Brunswick (right on the Provincial border with us, basically the same community though) power was also lost, but ever so briefly.

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Now onto Arthur and I can only speak of the area I reside in and will be a very personable experience, but based on previous experiences and lessons learned and Nova Scotia Powers' response to it in our area. When I arose on Saturday July 5, 2014 at about 9:00 AM, there was no rain or no real wind to speak of at that time. I forget exactly what time but I was scheduled to play softball at either 11 AM or Noon, might have even been 10 AM in a softball tournament happening in our community. I played in the outfield and at times would experience the odd wind gust that could almost move me back a step or two but didn't. Towards the end of that game the wind could move the softball about 20 feet when hit high into the air. There was no rain at all and the Sun was pretty much shining the entire time, not what I was expecting or I am sure anybody else was expecting. After this game I drove around what we call out here the Shore Road (really Tidnish Head Road I believe) and noticed a tree that had completely fallen over the power lines I think and I believe this was about 1 PM, but could be wrong about the time depending what time our game actually started. Concerned I drove back to my place of business to check to see if the power was still on and it was, the fallen tree had just affected many in the area it had fallen and not the whole community and I then proceeded to complete the plans I had for the afternoon in Sackville, New Brunswick and Amherst, Nova Scotia and never encountered any rain or real bad winds. I eventually made it back to the Rodney Estabrooks Memorial Ball Field in Tidnish at about 5 PM and watched a few fly balls that were hit into the outfield move about 20 or 30 feet as a result of the high winds at the time. It was about this time that the power failed in the whole community on July 5, 2014. I made my way to my place of business and discovered both generators I had needed some type of repair and were not functioning and recognizing the fact that power had been out so long for part of the community and having seen absolutely no Nova Scotia Power vehicles the whole day I proceeded to Amherst to purchase another generator after I put a closed early sign on my business (Amherst had power and never lost it that I know of). Fortunately when I returned a couple members of my community had fixed one of my generators which I am still very grateful for. Now it is about 8:00 PM and I have had many customers come in and inform me that Nova Scotia Power had advised them power would be restored at 11 PM (though I still had not seen any Nova Scotia Power vehicles in our area yet). At about 8:30 PM a Nova Scotia Power employee in a Nova Scotia Power pick-up truck stopped into my business and I asked him about the 11 PM time frame for power restoration. He informed him he was searching for what caused the power failure out here and has not yet found it and also informed me the South Shore was devastated by Arthur and many Nova Scotia Power crews were there and just by his look or expression I knew we were not getting power restored for that night. I informed him of the tree over the power line I had seen about 1 PM that day, but also told him that is not what caused the power failure for the rest of the community. I made the decision then to stay open 24 hours until power was restored regardless of what Nova Scotia Power was advising residents of when power would be restored (been down that road before, March, 2009 ice storm). I should mention there was no rain at all in our area and it was really very dry and the winds were not that much to speak of really, our community has experienced very much worse in the past and the power has stayed on. I am still baffled as to why we actually lost power that evening. I should also mention that Baie Verte, New Brunswick right next to us did not lose their power that I am aware of. Anyways during this first evening of being open 24 hours I noticed at 3:45 AM that we lost our dial tone for our phone lines and I know as

of 3:12 AM they were up and running, the last phone call I received (I do have documentation to verify this if needed).

Now onto the morning of July 6<sup>th</sup> 2014 of Arthurs' after effects. I made it home and was asleep by 9 AM and when I awoke I was told to my surprise that power was actually restored for the whole community, then learned that my business and many others who were on the same power grid or connection (not sure if that is the right terminology) lost power about one hour later again and the person who told me had called Nova Scotia Power to report this as soon as it happened and was assured power crews were still in the area and would fix it right away (again I believe I can get this person to verify this before the Board if requested to do so). Now again based on a previous experience I had with Nova Scotia Power about 4 years previous could have been 3 years (I am bad with exact dates sometimes) when power was actually restored but ever so briefly, it went out at my place of business and I immediately called Nova Scotia Power to report this and was told that they could not do anything until it was reported by more customers at that time. Now based on conversations over the years I had with Nova Scotia Power lineman crews, I knew that sometimes when power is restored sometimes certain grids take or get too much power and causes a section of the grid to fail (again not sure if this is the right terminology). I would equate this to when a circuit breaker kicks off and all you have to do is flip it back on to make it work again. So with knowing they needed more than one customer to report this outage and also knowing the crews who fix this relatively simple problem were still very much in our area I began to report phone numbers and names of people who were also on the same grid as I was before the Nova Scotia Power crews actually left our area. I must admit I was wrong about a couple of names and numbers I reported and I also have no supporting documentation to support this except the phone number this call was made from and have no idea of the exact date for this. The last few sentences purpose was to inform the Board that when power went out after being restored for about an hour that it was quite simply an overload of power on a certain section of the power, though I have no idea if that is true or not. I did have an opportunity to listen to someone's call to Nova Scotia Powers' automated outage information line after the second outage and it stated that this outage was caused by high winds and rain and would be restored by 11 PM on July 6<sup>th</sup> 2014. There was no high winds or rain on July 6 to cause this second outage and even during Arthur at least in our area there never was any rain.

Now onto communications during Arthur, as stated earlier phone lines were down at least from 3:45 AM on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014. I was told that when power was restored sometime in the morning of July 6 (I was asleep then) that the phone lines came back online. This only lasted for a bit though as when my business and many others lost power again the phones went down shortly after as they I believe are on the same section of the power grid as my business is. Now based on previous experience and conversations with actual Bell Alliant employees since the ice storm of 2009 I learned that the phones at least in our area need some type of power to stay up and running and the call box (again not sure if that is the right terminology) for our area is right next to my business. I have observed over the years Bell Alliant bring many times a generator in advance of when a storm has been called for to keep the phones lines up and running. I have been told they do have some sort of battery back-up in case of a power failure and I believe this to be true as we lost power about 5 PM on July 5<sup>th</sup> and the phone lines were still working at least at 3:12 AM on July 6. This would also explain why the phone line began working on July

6<sup>th</sup> when power was restored ever so briefly (about an hour) to our section of the power grid and lasted a little bit longer after power went out again (the batteries recharged a bit I am assuming).

Now when I arose again on July 6<sup>th</sup> from my sleep at about 11 AM or Noon the power that was restored was gone and phone lines again were down (though I had power at my residence, just no phone lines different part of the grid I guess, though almost right across the road from my business). As I was inspecting that everything was plugged into generators at my business properly, I was asked by a person in a vehicle outside if I had a cell phone, I stated no, but knew someone who did. This person requested an ambulance. I immediately without thought proceeded to get a cell phone as the phone lines were down whether you had power or not. I informed the person who drove this person to my location that I was calling for an Ambulance. Now in this part of Nova Scotia and it may be just unique to this part of the Province when you call 911 for anything you get 911 in New Brunswick which based on previous experience can be a small hassle and takes time, they usually scold you for calling them and tell you to look up and sometimes how to get a hold of Nova Scotia 911. Knowing this I made the call in view of the person who requested this but out of earshot I did not want to add to the stress of this person listening to the hassle of actually getting them an ambulance based on previous experiences, but wanted them to know that someone was actually coming for them. I took a different approach from the past and just reported it and the address and this seemed to avoid the usual hassle experienced, though it did take longer than it should have though, but much quicker than a couple of past experiences. When this was finally reported to 911 Nova Scotia Ambulatory Services and I was told the dispatched call was made, pretty much it seemed like within a minute, members of the Tidnish Bridge Fire Department began showing up and they just kept coming, it was like a swat team was just appearing and was very impressive. Now I made certain assumptions during this event, it does not mean these assumptions were actually correct, but were very probable and could very well have been repeated in many parts of the Province. The person who requested an ambulance I assumed came from their home which had power and no phone line as a result of the section of the power grid that supplies the phone line service being down and having no cell phone of their own. I did take the opportunity to ask members of the Fire Department about the phone lines and if they had an emergency contact for Bell Alliant to arrange a generator to restore at least the phone lines to the area, they never had such information. I did learn that the phone lines are their emergency back-up if their regular means of contact fails with the 911 service. To be fair to Bell Alliant I was told that when power was actually restored for about an hour on July 6<sup>th</sup> in the morning there was someone from the company at the callbox and the power actually failed after they left. Now after speaking with the employee of Nova Scotia 911 Ambulatory Care this employee gave me permission to call back if *I had the need to about my call. After a bit, not to long though I again dialed 911 as instructed and requested to speak with the person at 911 Nova Scotia Ambulatory Care that I had spoken with earlier, now this call was back to the usual problem that I shouldn't be calling 911 in New Brunswick when I am in Nova Scotia and I should look up how to get into contact with 911 Nova Scotia. I explained my instructions from my previous call and stated that I really do not need to talk to you and please connect me and that I have no other means of connecting with 911 Nova Scotia. This 911 New Brunswick person took my information and then as happens sometimes the cell phone got disconnected. I dialed 611 as I wanted to report my concerns about the phone lines to Bell Alliant but got Tellus instead, my Pay As You Go phone provider. I did get very shortly a return phone call*

*from the person I spoke with at Nova Scotia Ambulatory Care and explained what I assumed and I stress I assumed this based on what is probable that the person who required an ambulance had power at their residence, but no phone or cell phone to call for themselves and had to drive to a place where they could receive the help they required. I told this person that based on what I have read in the papers over the years that through Emergency Management all of these departments should be able to communicate with each other. I also stated what I knew about the Bell Alliant call box and all it would take is a generator to restore phone service and also told this person that by not doing so it could actually cost someone their life which was my motivation for my secondary call. To my surprise as I was just beginning to apologize for calling 911 about this I was thanked for calling and that this person would pass it up the chain of command. I should note this person did an amazing job with instructing me what to do with a person in distress. We are very lucky in this Province. I should also note the person I called 911 about is fine. I also can supply the cell phone number the original call was made from and also the cell phone number the 2<sup>nd</sup> call was made from and also the number 911 Ambulatory Care number that returned my 911 call from if needed. Phone lines were somewhat restored at 4:18 AM on July 7, 2014 when a generator was brought to the call box ( I do have limited video evidence of this if needed). I also have no clue if this phone line problem was just for our area of the Province or if it was more rampant.*

*I do not know if The Public Utilities Act covers 911 service or Bell Alliant, but respectfully submit it should be an aspect the Board should enquire about.*

*Now between the ice storm of 2009 and the King sized damage that Arthur created in July 2014, Nova Scotia Power in this area at least arranged the trimming and also the complete cutting down of some trees and this did work so very effectively that there was a spell of at least a couple of years or more that power was virtually never disrupted ( I can offer testimony of this if needed). Though since last fall about when Nova Scotia Power announced plans it was considering laying off or reducing lineman crews, power here just has not been the same. This is my worst fall, winter and spring that I have an actual memory of power service. Power has been off or flickered just enough that this last nine months has been much worse than the last nine years combined it seems. As evidence of this on Sunday March 23 at approximately 4:45 PM at my business I was informed that I was required to provide about six hours of video surveillance from that day. Now my surveillance system is broken up in hours with eight cameras and is only saved for almost six days and then it erases and rerecords and each hour I have to download takes almost 22 or 23 hours without power interruption. There was and were so many power interruptions or just power flickering failures after March 23 that this took me at least over three weeks to download and save as the court required( I can offer supplementary documents for this if required).*

*Respectfully,*

*Richard Plett*

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