Department of Environment and Climate Change

Environmental Assessments for Onshore Wind Energy Projects



Why We Did This Audit

- Environmental impacts should be known before a project begins, and approved projects should be monitored to protect the environment
- Fourteen onshore wind energy projects received environmental assessment approval during our audit period (January 2023 to August 2025)
- The Province is relying on onshore wind energy to achieve the 2030 renewable energy targets
- We last audited this topic in 2017

Key Audit Results

- We found Nova Scotia's environmental assessment process is generally consistent with that of other Canadian jurisdictions.
- However, our testing of onshore wind energy projects identified weaknesses in how the Department of Environment and Climate Change administers environmental assessments:
  - Information relevant to the Minister's decision was not found in briefing materials and decision options.
  - Government reviewer comments were not reflected in project approval terms and conditions.
  - Project approval terms and conditions lack measurable criteria, deadlines, and submission requirements.
  - No formal policy guides application reviews, resulting in inconsistent application processes.
- Once projects are approved, the Department does not appropriately monitor compliance with project terms and conditions intended to manage environmental risks, due to lack of:
  - Review and verification of compliance with terms and conditions.
  - Verification by required subject matter experts.
  - Evaluation of the effectiveness of terms and conditions in reducing environmental impacts.
- Ministerial project approval decisions were outside the scope of this audit.

This report makes

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Recommendations

to strengthen environmental assessment administration and compliance monitoring for onshore wind energy projects in Nova Scotia