

Kelly McParland: Ontario quietly reverses field on wind, solar energy

[Kelly McParland](#) February 12, 2011 – 12:01 pm



Brett Gundlock

Dalton McGuinty: Nothing to see here folks. Hey, how 'bout that Egypt eh!

Times of international turmoil are great moments for domestic governments to make important announcements they don't want to be noticed. Especially if the announcement involves a sudden reversal in policy that could seriously embarrass the government.

So Friday afternoon was an ideal time for Ontario's Liberal government to take a big chunk of its alternative energy program and chuck it overboard. Attention was riveted on Egypt, where spectacular events were unfolding. The perfect opportunity for Premier Dalton McGuinty to engineer yet another major reversal, while paying a minimal price among voters.

After years of touting wind projects as a critical piece of the alternative energy puzzle, the government let slip — very quietly — that offshore wind projects are no longer part of the game plan. Turns out there just isn't enough scientific evidence that offshore wind projects do a lick of good, [said Brad Duguid](#), the energy minister.

"It's simply a case of recognizing we need to take a closer look at the science on freshwater offshore wind projects," said Duguid. "Right now there's only one in the world we're aware of, in Sweden. There's a number of issues that need to be looked at before anything could ever be considered for approval."

Gee, now wouldn't you think the government would have checked out the science *before* insisting wind power was the way of the future? Evidently not. The McGuinty people have been pushing ahead vigorously on the wind front ever since they concluded they could squeeze more votes from

trendy enviro-enthusiasts, who are in favour of anything that sounds remotely Greenish, whether it makes sense or not.

They've been running into a spot of bother, though, as rural residents grow increasingly agitated at the monster wind towers being slapped up wherever the government sees fit to put them. Turns out the government may have been a bit rash in dismissing complaints that the low-level noise from the turbines can cause health problems. [A court challenge](#) launched late in January claims that the 550-metre minimum setback is far too close for comfort, and argues the government didn't do adequate homework into the potential health hazards when it declared the towers to be free of any danger.

Added to McGuinty's problems with wind are similar signs of trouble on the solar front. After strongly encouraging individual solar projects, and offering outrageously generous pricing on solar-generated power, the province unexpectedly announced last summer it was slashing the rate it would pay on some projects. On Friday, hundreds more Ontarians were told that installations they'd erected at the behest of the government can't be connected to the provincial grid because of technical problems. Rural residents, some of whom have invested large amounts in solar generating operations, will be left high and dry. The [Toronto Star reports](#):

"I've got \$70,000 sitting right out in my backyard," said Brian Wilson, who lives near Belleville, of his 10-kilowatt solar array. "I can go two doors down and they've got \$70,000 invested, too."

But they've both been told that they can't connect to the electrical grid because of technical issues.

"It's a mess," says Kim Doherty of Farmed Energy Inc., who supplies solar equipment. He started getting calls from clients this week, saying they'd been told no connections are available for their projects.

One of his clients, a father-and-son team near Strathroy, made a \$170,000 down payment on solar equipment, and built four concrete support platforms at a cost of \$20,000 each, Doherty said

Angering rural voters, and battering your credibility with the environmental crowd, aren't great ideas if you run a government that faces an election in eight months. So it's no wonder that Ontario's Liberals sought to hide the bad news by releasing it when (they hoped) no one was watching. But the excitement in Egypt won't last forever, and eventually people will notice that Ontario's government, once again, has been forced into a humiliating retreat at considerable trouble and cost to individual Ontarians.

National Post