



## News Release

### Appeal to Premier for Heartland Environmental Assessment

**(Edmonton)** January 14, 2011. Alberta Environment has now responded to Responsible Electricity Transmission for Albertans' (RETA's) request that AltaLink and EPCOR be required to conduct a formal Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposed Heartland Transmission Project.

"We are very disappointed with Alberta Environment's response that they will not order an EIA for a project the magnitude of the Heartland Project", said Bruce Johnson, President of RETA. "Our members had certainly hoped a formal EIA would have been required considering how massive this project is, and because this is the first of the projects labeled 'Critical Transmission Infrastructure' by the government."

Many environmental, health, safety, property value and aesthetic impacts have been identified by RETA and others during the past two years, based on peer-reviewed studies in the scientific literature. The majority of these studies have explored the impacts of high voltage power lines at the 240kV range and lower. It can therefore be expected the impacts of the proposed double-circuit 500kV Heartland Project, with towers and lines almost twice as high as the tallest towers currently in Alberta, would be even greater than impacts of reported studies to date.

The Alberta Environment Minister has responded that the impact of transmission lines is well understood by his department. An Alberta Environment spokesperson has indicated the government doesn't need to do a study, so it won't; and, the impact of the Heartland Line would be minimal. As well, the Minister is satisfied the impacts will be addressed at the upcoming Alberta Utilities Commission hearing.

Johnson continued, "This is absolutely incredulous! The Environment Minister and his public affairs spokesperson suggest they already know what the outcome of a formal EIA would be, without one being conducted. How is this possible? What kind of a crystal ball do they have that we do not? And they, better than anyone else, know that only a formal EIA under provincial legislation has sufficient rigor to properly assess the environmental, public health, public safety and socio-economic impacts for a proposal the size of the Heartland Project."

RETA has appealed to Premier Stelmach to order a formal EIA pursuant to provincial legislation on the basis of the magnitude and uniqueness of the Heartland Project. In his letter to the Premier, Johnson wrote, "...we plead with you to insist that AltaLink and EPCOR conduct a formal EIA to convince Albertans the provincial government cares about environmental, public health and public safety impacts of proposed overhead power lines that will be almost twice the height of any power lines ever built in Alberta."

It is important to note even though the Alberta Government unilaterally exempted, in 2008, all power lines from the requirement for formal EIAs, the Minister of Environment retained the authority to order an EIA if he thought one was necessary.

The letter to the Premier also cites several studies of the impacts of overhead high voltage lines on birds. For example, there are about 175 million bird deaths annually in the U.S. from collisions with overhead transmission lines, which is greater than the total number of birds killed by hunters.

A study in the Netherlands estimated 214 bird deaths per kilometre of power line every year. If this statistic is applied to the proposed 66-kilometre Heartland Line, an estimated 14,124 bird deaths could occur every year. This number pales the 1,600 or so ducks reported to have been killed in Syncrude's tailings ponds, and that was purportedly a one-time event.

"How much do Albertans have to put up with when it comes to electricity transmission lines?" said Johnson. "In 2008, the Alberta Government exempted all power lines from the requirement for EIAs. In 2009, the government passed Bills 19 and 50 which collectively diminish our private landowner rights when it comes to utilities, and take away our opportunity to have a say on whether all these new power lines are even needed. Then the government hands out these very lucrative transmission infrastructure projects on silver platters to the anointed few companies without any competitive bidding process. And to top it all off....Alberta electricity consumers have to pay for all of these new lines and towers, without their concerns about the environment, their health, their safety and their property values being taken seriously. Where will all this end?"

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For more information or questions, see [www.RETA.ca](http://www.RETA.ca) or contact:

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Attachments: January 14, 2011 letter to Premier Stelmach  
January 5, 2011 letter to Honourable Rob Renner