

Energy Corp. will be 'most secretive' N.L. agency: Jones

Last Updated: Wednesday, May 28, 2008 / 9:45 AM NT

[CBC News](#)



Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones described a new energy-related bill as having draconian implications. (CBC)

Newfoundland and Labrador's new energy corporation will be a secretive organization whose activities will be hidden from public view, opposition politicians say.

The governing Progressive Conservatives are proposing legislation that would limit the public's access to information about the Energy Corp., and will broaden Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro's mandate into other areas, including oil and gas development. The corporation has already become involved in alternative energy projects, including wind energy.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones said the new legislation — formally titled An Act to Amend the Energy Corporation Act — would make it "one of the most secretive organizational structures" in the province.

Jones told the legislature Tuesday that the corporation would be "above the Access to Information Act, outside of the standard auditing provisions and not subject to the laws that now govern other departments of government."

Jones described the proposed measures as "draconian."

The new bill places tight restrictions on the public's access to information that's considered to be "commercially sensitive." It even allows the corporation's chief executive officer and board of directors to overrule any attempts by the auditor general and the information commissioner to make that information public.

But Natural Resources Minister Kathy Dunderdale told the legislature the measures are needed to allow the Energy Corp. the ability to cut deals with large oil and gas companies.

"The energy company, Mr. Speaker, is a hybrid," Dunderdale said.

"It needs to function in the real world of business but at the same time it has to be accountable to the people of the province. What we are doing in this legislation is giving the Energy Corp. the tools to be able to do that effectively."

Because sensitive financial information and corporate plans could change hands during those negotiations, Dunderdale said, companies need assurance that such information will remain confidential.

Dunderdale said these exceptions will be narrowly applied, and that the Energy Corp. will have to follow the same disclosure and audit rules as other government agencies when it comes to its day-to-day operations.