



EB-2007-0824

IN THE MATTER OF the *Ontario Energy Board Act*, 1998, S.O. 1998, c.15 (Schedule B);

AND IN THE MATTER OF an application by Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited for an order or orders approving or fixing just and reasonable distribution rates and other charges, to be effective May 1, 2008.

BEFORE: Paul Vlahos
Presiding Member

Paul Sommerville
Member

DECISION

Introduction

Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited is a licensed distributor of electricity providing service to consumers within its licensed service area. Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited filed an application with the Ontario Energy Board (the "Board") for an order or orders approving or fixing just and reasonable rates for the distribution of electricity and other charges, to be effective May 1, 2008.

Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited is one of over 80 electricity distributors in Ontario that are regulated by the Board. In 2006, the Board announced the establishment of a multi-year electricity distribution rate-setting plan for the years 2007-2010. As part of the plan, Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited is one of the electricity distributors to have its rates adjusted for 2008 on the basis of the 2nd Generation Incentive Rate Mechanism ("IRM") process.

To streamline the process for the approval of distribution rates and charges for distributors, the Board issued its *Report of the Board on Cost of Capital and 2nd Generation Incentive Regulation for Ontario's Electricity Distributors* (the "Report") on December 20, 2006. Among other things, the Report contained the relevant guidelines for 2008 rate adjustments ("the Guidelines") for distributors applying for rate adjustments pursuant to the IRM process.

Notice of Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited's rate application was given through newspaper publication in Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited's service area advising of the availability of the rate application and advising how interested parties may intervene in the proceeding or comment on the application. There were no intervention requests and no comments were received. The Board proceeded by way of a written hearing. Board staff participated actively in the proceeding.

While the Board has considered the entire record in this rate application, it has made reference only to such evidence as is necessary to provide context to its findings.

Price Cap Index Adjustment

Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited's rate application was filed on the basis of the Guidelines. In fixing new rates and charges for Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited, the Board has applied the policies described in the Report.

As outlined in the Report, distribution rates under the 2nd Generation IRM are to be adjusted by a price escalator less a productivity factor (X-factor) of 1.0%. Based on the final 2007 data published by Statistics Canada, the Board has established the price escalator to be 2.1%. The resulting price cap index adjustment is therefore 1.1%. The rate model was adjusted to reflect the newly calculated price cap adjustment. This price cap index adjustment applies to distribution rates (fixed and variable charges) uniformly across all customer classes. An adjustment for the transition to a common deemed capital structure of 60% debt and 40% equity was also effected. In addition, a change in the federal income tax rate effective January 1, 2008 was also incorporated into the rate model and reflected in distribution rates.

The Board also considered the reduction in Ontario capital tax and the increase in capital cost allowance (CCA) applicable to certain buildings and computers acquired after March 2007. The Board has decided that adjustments related to these items are

not required, either because the changes are not of general application, or because they do not appear to be material.

The price cap index adjustment does not apply to the following components of the rates:

- the specific service charges;
- the smart meter rate adder (an amount in the fixed components of the rates associated with smart meter cost recovery); and
- any continuing rate riders.

Accordingly, the Board is providing Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited with a rate model (spreadsheet) that reflects the price cap adjustments described above. Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited is required to review the rate model (spreadsheet) and to confirm its completeness and accuracy with the Board at the time it files its Draft Rate Order. Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited shall file with the Board a Draft Rate Order attaching the proposed Tariff of Rates and Charges which will reflect the Board's price cap adjustments as verified by Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited and any other Board findings contained in this decision that would impact 2008 rates. Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited shall also provide the rate model (spreadsheet) that underpins the Tariff of Rates and Charges. Any changes to the Board's rate model (spreadsheet) shall be clearly identified and explained.

Rate Riders

When the Board approved new rates for distributors for 2006, it also approved the recovery of regulatory asset balances on a final basis. The Board approved rate riders to facilitate the recovery of the approved balances over the two remaining years of the four-year recovery period mandated by the Minister of Energy (i.e. May 1, 2004 to April 30, 2008). The rate rider(s) associated with the recovery of regulatory assets will cease on May 1, 2008 and shall be removed from the Tariff of Rates and Charges, unless a previous Board decision authorized the continuation of such riders beyond April 30, 2008. No such authorization has been previously provided by the Board for Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited. The final balance in account 1590 cannot be confirmed until after the current recovery period has expired, i.e. after April 30, 2008. Once the residual balance in deferral account 1590 is finalized, the residual balance will be disposed in a future proceeding.

Smart Meter Rate Adder

Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited requested the continuation of the smart meter rate adder previously approved by the Board in order to provide funding for possible future implementation of smart meter costs and to minimize future rate impacts. The Board-approved rate adder for Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited of \$0.25 per month per metered customer shall continue. Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited's variance accounts for smart meter program implementation costs, previously authorized by the Board, shall also be continued.

Retail Transmission Service Rates

On October 17, 2007, the Board issued its EB-2007-0759 Rate Order setting new Uniform Transmission Rates for Ontario transmitters, effective November 1, 2007. The Board approved a decrease of 18% to the wholesale transmission network rate, a decrease of 28% to the wholesale transmission line connection rate, and an increase of 7% to the wholesale transformation connection rate. The combined change in the wholesale transmission line connection and transformation connection rates is a reduction to the connection rate of 5%.

On October 29, 2007, the Board issued a letter to all electricity distributors directing them to propose an adjustment to their retail transmission service (RTS) rates to reflect the new Uniform Transmission Rates for Ontario transmitters effective November 1, 2007. The objective of resetting the rates was to minimize the prospective balance in variance accounts 1584 and 1586 and also to mitigate intergenerational inequities.

Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited filed a proposal to adjust its RTS rates, which was subsequently withdrawn. As part of its amended application, Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited indicated that the RTS rates would be adjusted at the time of rebasing. Given the magnitude of the changes in wholesale transmission rates, the Board rejects the argument that no adjustment is warranted at this time. The Board directs Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited to reduce its RTS – Network Service Rates by 18% and its RTS – Line and Transformation connection Service Rates by 5%. Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited is required to include this change in its rate model (spreadsheet) to be filed with the Board.

Implementation

Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited's new distribution rates are effective May 1, 2008.

The Board directs that:

1. Hearst Power Distribution Company Limited shall file with the Board a Draft Rate Order attaching the proposed Tariff of Rates and Charges and the supporting rate model (spreadsheet) within seven (7) days of the date of this Decision. The proposed Tariff of Rates and Charges shall be filed in a Word format. The adjusted rate model shall be filed in an Excel format.

DATED at Toronto, March 13, 2008

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD

Original signed by

Paul Vlahos
Presiding Member

Original signed by

Paul Sommerville
Member