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Mass. not sold on joint RFP with Vermont, Conn.

By Lisa Wood

Massachusetts officials on Wednesday criticized a plan by Connecticut to revise its renewable portfolio standard and said they have made no commitment to participate in a joint solicitation with Connecticut and Vermont.

Steven Clarke, assistant secretary in the Massachusetts' Executive Office for Energy and Environmental Affairs, said in an interview that he was "very surprised" by the idea of Massachusetts participating in the three-state solicitation that Connecticut officials described during a news conference earlier in the week.

Dan Esty, commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, or DEEP, had described the solicitation in a press call Monday where he announced possible legislative changes in the state's renewable portfolio standard, including allowing participation of large hydroelectric projects.

Esty said that Connecticut hopes to issue at least two renewable solicitations over the next few months. The first round would seek renewable energy from New England and New York that qualifies under Connecticut's Class 1, such as wind or solar energy, but no large hydro.

"We also intend to do this to the greatest extent possible in conjunction with our colleagues in Massachusetts and Vermont. So it really represents a first time ever attempt on a multi-state basis, on a regional basis, to work as a buying block in what we hope will allow us to come into a larger set of renewable projects at ratepayer friendly prices," Esty said during the news conference.

However, Barbara Kates-Garnick, Massachusetts undersecretary of energy, issued a statement Wednesday saying Massachusetts has made no commitment to the solicitation and has "serious concerns" about changes proposed for Connecticut's RFP.

"Massachusetts has taken the lead, working very closely with other New England states, in putting together a regional procurement plan for renewable energy. While we embrace a wide range of clean energy initiatives, we have serious concerns about how Connecticut's proposed changes to its renewable portfolio standard will affect the region's renewable market," she said in the statement.

She added, "We have been talking with Connecticut officials, but have made no commitment to a first round procurement. We continue to work with the Massachusetts attorney general's office, stakeholder agencies, and our utilities on an RFP through our own process, which is currently receiving fast track consideration by the Department of Public Utilities."

Under that RFP, Massachusetts utilities plan to seek renewables under long-term contract for at least 1.8% of the load.

Separately, in an interview Clarke said Massachusetts is "very aggressively" moving forward on another renewable solicitation under discussion among the six New England states. Governor Deval Patrick has played a lead role in advancing that solicitation, he said. The solicitation is in planning before the New England States Committee on Electricity.

Clarke also criticized changes the Connecticut proposal to include large-scale hydroelectricity in its

portfolio standard. The issue has been a hot-button one in New England, particularly among those who say inexpensive Canadian hydroelectricity would undercut local renewable energy development.

Massachusetts considers large hydro “to be a mature technology” that does not require support through the RPS, Clarke said. He added that Massachusetts is concerned that changes Connecticut makes to its RPS could impact the regional market because of the state’s large load.

However, Dennis Schain, DEEP communications director, pointed out that the Connecticut proposal does not include the hydroelectric contracts in the first solicitation. Nor does it allow the large-scale hydro to participate in the renewable energy credit market. Instead, it envisions the hydro contracts coming from a second solicitation, possibly with other states, later in the year.

Schain also said that Esty did not mean to imply Monday that the solicitation with Massachusetts was “a done deal.”

“The states are still taking and trying to figure out the most effective way to proceed,” he said, adding that Massachusetts and Vermont seemed “to be the most interested in working together.”

Connecticut’s RPS changes are proposed within a bill, Proposed Substitute Bill No. 1138, which was the subject of a public hearing Tuesday before the General Assembly’s Energy and Technology Committee.

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