

# CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

*Electricity Framework 5 year  
Review*

October 22, 2007



# Presentation will cover

- Definition of “Consensus”
- Principles for a consensus process
- Making it Happen
- What happens If consensus cannot be reached
- Some Myths & Misconceptions about consensus



# CASA Definition

A process by which all those who have a stake in the outcome aim to reach agreement on actions or outcomes....



# AUTHORITY

Government of Alberta will sanction and implement CASA decisions that meet two criteria:

- Consensus is reached among the stakeholders
- The decisions are based on that consensus



# CONSENSUS PRINCIPLES

- Clear purpose and objectives
- Inclusive Process
- Voluntary participation
- Self design
- Flexibility
- Equal Opportunity
- Respect for diverse interests
- Accountability
- Time Limits
- Commitment to implement and monitor



# PRINCIPLES

## 1. PURPOSE DRIVEN

- Purpose of group and its objectives must be clear (terms of reference)

## 2. INCLUSIVE

- Those needed to make a deal
- Those who could block a deal



# PRINCIPLES

## 3. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

- Parties are free to participate
- Prepared to work with others to develop a solution

## 4. SELF DESIGN

- Parties design their own process
- CASA offers a template



# PRINCIPLES

## 5. FLEXIBILITY

- What starts out as the problem may change
- Information can also change the scope or purpose of a project

## 6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

- To be fully engaged in the process
- To access information (technical, scientific, policy, minutes, reports, etc.)





# PRINCIPLES

## 7. RESPECT FOR DIVERSE INTERESTS

- No one perspective is right or wrong
- Demands patience, tolerance and goodwill

## 8. ACCOUNTABILITY

- Participants represent an identifiable constituency
- Responsible for representing that group AND REPORTING BACK TO THEM
- Responsible to uphold the process



# PRINCIPLES

## 9. TIME LIMITS

- Establish timelines for meeting milestones (e.g. gathering information, assessing options)
- Recognize a consensus process takes time

## 10. IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR

- Parties must commit to implement agreements
- Plan for monitoring results/outcomes



# MAKING IT WORK

## BE COLLABORATIVE AND INTEREST-BASED

- Recognize process may start with “positioning” and allow for this
- Ask open ended questions
- Encourage constructive contribution
- Make sure your interests are clear and known to all
- Help others to clarify their interests
- Keep focusing on solutions/outcomes



# MAKING IT WORK

- Include some people with experience
- Model collaborative behaviour
- Consider using a neutral to guide discussion
- Use round tables; post ground rules
- Take time to know each other away from the table



# MAKING IT WORK

- **TALK FIRST**
  - About working together, let people talk about their concerns and issues, then, clarify the problem.
- **LISTEN**
  - to each other's perceptions
  - Seek to **UNDERSTAND** interests
- **GENERATE AND ASSESS OPTIONS LATER**

“Talking – Listening – Deciding” and knowing the sequence



# Arriving at Consensus

## Consensus is Reached when

- Each party is satisfied with a decision
  - The decision meets the needs of your stakeholder group
- Each party “Is Able to Live With” the outcome



# When to Block?

- Whenever a decision is not in the best interests of your stakeholder group
- Each party has a right to block a decision
  - Though must be clear about WHY
- Other parties have a duty to address the interests of the concerned party



# Can't Reach Consensus?

- For CASA project teams and zones:
  - Non-consensus items will be brought to the Board for further direction





# CASA Fall Back Mechanism

- When non-consensus items are referred to CASA Board the discussion must include
  - A description of the issue
  - The positions of the disagreeing parties and their reasons for disagreeing
  - The Team's assessment of alternate decisions CASA (or some other authority) might make



# “Some Truths & Misconceptions about Consensus



# Silence is Consensus

- There is a responsibility to check silences
- The process must be conducive to everyone being able to speak and express disagreement
- Make sure constituencies are briefed – ask for a report back with their response



# I Will Have to Compromise

- Not true! No one should ever give up what is important to them just so an agreement can be reached
- Know what is important to you from the outset and make this clear to the table
- The process must result in an outcome that is better for each stakeholder than his or her next best option



# I Will Have to Abandon My Principles

- Fundamental values should never be horse-traded for the sake of agreement
- Recognize there are different principles at play – you may disagree with some of them
- Focus on what's important to you
- If your principles are violated, speak up
- No agreement is always a legitimate outcome



# I will have to give up authority

- Not true! However you will have to share decision-making
- Unless the most important stakeholders 'buy into' an agreement there won't be one
- Consensus is about win-win, not about power or control



# I will have to 'Be Tough'

- Can't hear the other person's interests if you are giving him or her a hard time
- The best participants are the ones who almost always get a good deal for the person across the table *as well*
- Get tough on the content not the people



# One party can 'Hold us Hostage'

- The only legitimate reason for 'holding out' is if you believe your interests will be better met outside the process
- The group is responsible for ensuring that the 'holdout' is rejecting a proposal on grounds that would be compelling *if you found yourself in that person's shoes*





# I'll have to work with 'the enemy'

- There are no enemies – only different needs and different interests
- Aim to do well for your side but not hurt your 'enemies'
- Exhibit goodwill, respect diverse interests, and stay focused on outcomes



# CASA Secretariat

- Process caretaker and Project Management
- Liaison between CASA Board of Directors and project teams
- Provides start-up services for zones (guidance on the process, some facilitation, administration, materials, etc)
- Communications (media, articles, website)
- Facilitate stakeholder networking
- Facilitate meetings and workshops



# References

- The Consensus Building Institute
  - A joint project by Harvard/MIT
  - [www/cbi-web.org](http://www/cbi-web.org)
- RESOLVE
  - Center for Environmental and Public Policy  
Dispute Resolution
    - [www.resolve.org](http://www.resolve.org)

