

LM WIND POWER:

Major multi-year export contract results in 85 new jobs and 200 existing jobs consolidated with GE deal

Geneviève Gélinas

GASPÉ: – LM Wind Power’s blade manufacturing plant in Gaspé will create 85 new jobs, in addition to the 200 existing ones, in order to increase its production and supply wind farms located in the United States. The signing of a contract with turbine builder GE guarantees work for a multi-year period for the plant.

The April decision of the Quebec government to stop ordering wind energy for a few years put some pressure on LM Wind Power to secure export sales in order to avoid a lengthy production reduction or even a total closure, temporary or permanent, of its Gaspé plant.

The efforts of the plant’s management and employees paid off and the good news was confirmed on August 23, two months after several press reports presented the potential of a contract with a United States turbine builder GE (General Electric).

Gaspé plant’s director general, Alexandre Boulay, didn’t release many details about the agreement, not even the name of the turbine builder “for reasons tied to competition”. However, the SPEC learned that GE is the turbine builder ordering the blades and that the blade model is 42 metres in length. The blades will replace units that are already installed in wind farms located in the United States, including in Texas.



Photo: G. Gélinas

LM Windpower’s manufacturing plant in Gaspé is creating 85 new jobs.

Mr. Boulay acknowledged that the flexibility of the plant workers was a “decisive” factor for the signing of the contract. In June, the 175 unionized workers of the plant accepted to modify their working schedule in order to have the plant producing 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That labour concession of the employees will allow the plant to be “more competitive”, says Mr. Boulay.

LM is currently building a training centre next to the plant in order to teach some techniques to its 85 new employees, including hands on work. The hiring process should be completed in December. Up to 50 new workers have already

been hired.

The production of the 42 metre blades will start on September 19. Over the last few months, the LM work force has fabricated blades that are 55.8 metres in length and blades that are slightly shorter, but longer than 50 metres. Some of the output is sent to the Mesgi’g Uguj’s’n wind farm, owned by the three Gaspé Peninsula Micmac communities and Innergex. The wind farm is currently under construction behind Escuminac.

Transport

The client, which is GE, not the manufacturer, decides about the transportation means

used to haul the blades between the plant and the wind farm.

“The seaport is unavoidable, because it is accessible all year long but the railway is also there,” points out Alexandre Boulay.

Whatever the long haul means selected, the blades will leave the LM plant on a truck trailer for a few kilometres over the busy Highway 132 and road 198 to reach the port and the railway.

The Town of Gaspé is working on a new road project that would connect the plant and the port. “There is a mountain to cross; I am not making promises,” says Gaspé Mayor Daniel Côté.

Windmill blade exports

could prove that the railway must be upgraded, adds Daniel Côté. The Quebec government, the owner of the Matapédia-Gaspé line since the spring of 2015, has not committed recently to investing between Port Daniel and Gaspé, arguing that the traffic volume must be sufficient.

Trains have not circulated east of New Carlisle since the summer of 2014. The line east of Caplan was in fact put in a dormant state by the Quebec government in the spring of 2015. Some bridges have to be upgraded before traffic resumes east of Caplan.

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