

Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta



Citation: Alberta (Market Surveillance Administrator) v. Enmax Energy Corp.
2007 ABQB 309

Date: 20070705
Docket: 0701 01778
Registry: Calgary

In the Matter of *The Electric Utilities Act*, S.A. 2003, c. E-5.1, and regulations made thereunder

Between:

Market Surveillance Administrator

Applicant

- and -

**Enmax Energy Corporation and
Enmax Energy Marketing Inc.**

Respondents

**Reasons for Judgment
of the
Honourable Mr. Justice Alan D. Macleod**

[1] The Market Surveillance Administrator (MSA), acts as the "watch dog" over the electricity market in Alberta. For sometime now the MSA has been concerned about the uneconomic importing of electricity into Alberta and that it may be having an undesirable effect on Alberta electricity prices. As part of its investigation into this matter the MSA is looking into

certain imports of energy by the Respondents (Enmax). Generally speaking, it is the expectation of market participants that investigations by the MSA in pursuing its mandate under the Electric Utilities Act (the Act) are confidential until such time as the chair of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board appoints a tribunal to embark upon a hearing, which is something it must do if there is a request to do so by the MSA under section 59 of the Act.

[2] The issue before the Court is the extent, if any, to which the MSA may seek the Court's help to enforce certain powers during the investigation and how it should be dealt with given the confidential nature of the investigation.

[3] Over the course of the investigation the MSA has received letters, voice records and other information from Enmax. As part of its investigation, the MSA has also interviewed a number of Enmax's employees. During the course of the interviews, the employees were advised not to answer a number of questions by counsel for Enmax, who was also acting as the employees' counsel.

[4] The MSA applied to this Court for an order compelling the employees to answer the questions by filing an Originating Notice of Motion and a supporting Affidavit on February 15, 2007. Counsel for Enmax, concerned that commercially sensitive information would be made public if the application were to proceed in open court, applied for an interim confidentiality and sealing order. I granted an interim order on a without prejudice basis and the entire file was sealed and the matter set down for a hearing which was conducted *in camera*.

[5] The MSA says that the questions were reasonable ones and that the court has the authority to compel the answers. It further believes that this authority should be exercised in public. Enmax asserts in a cross motion that the MSA cannot seek the relief requested and furthermore, the Act does not give the court the power to grant the requested relief. Moreover, it is important that this process be confidential.

[6] During the hearing counsel focussed their submissions on whether the MSA can bring this application and whether the Court has power to compel the employees to answer reasonable questions. Another issue canvassed was whether this application, as well as future ones, should be subject to sealing and *in camera* orders to protect their confidentiality or whether any special procedure should be followed. The questions to which the MSA seeks answers were not addressed pending the outcome of this ruling.

Legislative Background

[7] In the 1990's the electrical industry was restructured and it was thought that deregulation would open up the market to competition which would lead to downward pressure on electricity costs and rates. Legislation was passed in 1995 and 1998.

[8] In early 2003 further legislation in the form of the *Electrical Utilities Act*, S.A. 2003, c. e-5.1 was introduced into the legislature. One of the significant changes in the new legislation was

an increase in the independence of the MSA. During the second reading of Bill 3 which would later become the Act, Mr. Knight the MLA who introduced and led the Bill through the legislature stressed the importance that the MSA be able to “fulfill its mandate as the market watch dog for electricity consumers”: Alberta Legislative Assembly, *Hansard*, (26 February 2003) at 160 (Mr. Knight).

[9] The mandate of the MSA is broad. Section 49 reads:

49(1) The Market Surveillance Administrator has the mandate to carry out surveillance and investigation in respect of the supply, generation, transmission, distribution, trade, exchange, purchase or sale of electricity, electric energy, electricity services or ancillary services, or any aspect of those activities.

(2) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), the Market Surveillance Administrator’s mandate includes surveillance and investigation of any one or more of the following:

- (a) the conduct of market participants;
- (b) the structure and performance of the market;
- (c) the conduct of the Independent System Operator;
- (d) the conduct of the Balancing Pool;
- (e) the conduct of owners of generating units to which power purchase arrangements apply in meeting their obligations to provide the generating capacity set out in those power purchase arrangements;
- (f) arrangements, information sharing and decisions relating to market participants exchanging or wishing to exchange electric energy and ancillary services or any aspect of those activities;
- (g) arrangements, information sharing and decisions relating to market participants providing or wishing to provide retail electricity services to customers, or any aspect of those activities;
- (h) the relationship between the owner of an electric distribution system and its affiliated retailers or other retailers, or any aspect of the parties in the relationship;

(i) the relationship between the owner of an electric distribution system and a regulated rate provider or between the regulated rate provider and an affiliated retailer, or any aspect of the parties in the relationship;

(j) electricity exchanges on the tie lines connecting the interconnected electric system in Alberta with electric systems outside Alberta;

(k) any other conduct specified in the regulations made by the Minister under section 74.

(3) In carrying out surveillance and investigation of any conduct, the Market Surveillance Administrator must assess whether or not

(a) the conduct of market participants is consistent with the fair, efficient and openly competitive operation of the market,

(b) the person carrying out the conduct has complied with or is complying with this Act, the regulations, the ISO rules, market rules and any arrangements entered into under this Act or the regulations, and

(c) the ISO rules are sufficient to discourage anti-competitive practices in the electric industry and whether or not the ISO rules facilitate the fair, efficient and openly competitive operation of the market.

(4) As part of its mandate, the Market Surveillance Administrator may establish guidelines to further the fair, efficient and openly competitive operation of the market and must make those guidelines public.

[10] The MSA can investigate any matter falling within its mandate either after receiving a complaint, referral, or on its own initiative. It may also decline to investigate if it feels the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or trivial.

[11] The MSA has a significant number of powers to assist it in performing its investigations. Section 55 allows the MSA to enter the premises of market participants and obtain records and information. Section 55 reads as follows:

55(1) The Market Surveillance Administrator may, for the purpose of carrying out its mandate, do personally, or may authorize one or more of its officers, employees or any other person to do, any or all of the following:

(a) enter and inspect the business premises of a market participant;

- (b) make reasonable inquiries of any person working at those premises and require information to be provided under oath;
- (c) request the production of records that are or may be relevant;
- (d) temporarily remove records that are or may be relevant;
- (e) make copies of records that are or may be relevant;
- (f) request access to operate or request the operation of any computer system of the market participant to search any data or information contained in or available to the system and produce a document or information from the data.

(2) An activity carried out or action taken by or on behalf of the Market Surveillance Administrator under subsection (1) may only be carried out or taken during the normal business hours of the market participant.

(3) If the Market Surveillance Administrator removes records under subsection (1), the Market Surveillance Administrator may make copies of them and must return the original records within a reasonable time.

(4) A person working in the business premises of the market participant must co-operate reasonably with the Market Surveillance Administrator.

(5) A person acting under the authority of this section must carry identification in the form determined by the Market Surveillance Administrator and must present it on request.

[12] Section 56 permits the MSA to seek this Court's help in certain circumstances and the section reads as follows:

56(1) In this section and in sections 57 and 58, "Court" means the Court of Queen's Bench.

(2) If any person hinders, obstructs or impedes the Market Surveillance Administrator or refuses to co-operate with the Market Surveillance Administrator in the exercise of its mandate, the Market Surveillance Administrator may apply to the Court by notice of motion for an order under subsection (3).

(3) If the Court is satisfied that there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that access to premises or the production or removal of records is necessary for the Market Surveillance Administrator to carry out its mandate, the

Court may make any order it considers necessary to assist the Market Surveillance Administrator to obtain access or for the production or removal of records.

(4) An application for a Court order under this section may be made without notice to any other person unless the Court orders otherwise.

[13] Section 50 of the Act requires that the Market Surveillance Administrator carry out its mandate in a "fair and responsible manner". Section 6 of the Act directs market participants to conduct themselves in a manner that supports the fair, efficient and openly competitive operation of the market. Section 5 of the *Market Surveillance Regulation (Alta.) Reg. 166 - 2003* provides "any record obtained by the Market Surveillance Administrator pursuant to the Act or this regulation must be kept confidential and must be used only for the purposes of the Market Surveillance Administrator's mandate under the Act."

Issues

[14] Essentially there are two questions before this Court:

- 1) Can the MSA seek from this Court and can this Court grant any relief if the market participant's employees refuse to answer reasonable questions put to them under Section 55?
- 2) If the answer to question one is yes, should this Court make any shielding order or other directions to give effect to the alleged expectation of confidentiality?

Can the Court, under the existing circumstances, compel answers to reasonable questions?

[15] Enmax asserts that the MSA is a creature of statute and as such it has the limited powers as set out in the Act. Since the literal wording of section 56 does not explicitly permit the MSA to make an application to compel answers, this relief is not available. It points out that section 56(3) expressly allows the Court to grant an order with respect to access to the premises or the production or removal of documents. It does not explicitly allow the Court to compel answers to questions and Enmax argues that this omission is obviously deliberate.

[16] Enmax relies upon the doctrine of *expressio unius est exclusio*, which means that to express one thing is to exclude the other. It would have been a very simple thing for the legislature to have included a provision that the Court may compel answers or compel testimony as is the case under other legislation.

[17] Enmax points out that under section 54, if the MSA deems or realizes that the matter is in the jurisdiction of another body it may notify that body and it may collaborate with that other body including the regulators under the *Competition Act*, R.S.C., 1985, c. c-34. Enmax says that if employees are compelled to give answers to questions they may be subject to jeopardy as a result of the MSA's collaboration with the competition regulators. Because there are no

legislative safeguards as exist in other situations, including protection against self-incrimination for witnesses who appear in front of a tribunal under section 64, this Court ought to be slow to conclude that it can compel answers which Enmax says may end up in front of other bodies and subject it or their employees to other proceedings.

[18] In interpreting sections 55 and 56 of the Act I must bear in mind the provisions of the *Interpretation Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c. I-8. Section 10 provides that “an enactment shall be construed as being remedial, and shall be given the fair, large and liberal construction and interpretation that best ensures the attainment of its objects”. Under the heading of “Ancillary Powers” section 25(2) states “if in an enactment power is given to a person to do or enforce the doing of any act or thing, all other powers that are necessary to enable the person to do or enforce the doing of the act or thing are deemed to be given also”. While it is true that the MSA is a creature of statute that statute by virtue of section 44 provides that the MSA has the rights, powers and privileges of a natural person.

[19] Moreover, as urged by counsel for the MSA, I ought to interpret the statute in such way as to avoid an absurd result provided that it is a construction that the enactment can reasonably bear. The modern Rule dealing with that interpretation principle is reviewed at pages 85-86 of *Ruth Sullivan, Driedger on the Construction of Statutes*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Butterworths, 1994) and it is summarised as follows:

1. It is presumed that legislation is not intended to produce absurd consequences.
2. Absurdity is not limited to logical contradictions and internal incoherence; it includes violations of justice, reasonableness, common sense and other public standards. Also, absurdity is not limited to what is shocking or unthinkable; it may include any consequences that are judged to be undesirable because they contradict values or principles that are considered important by the courts.
3. Where the words of a legislative text allow for more than one interpretation, avoiding absurd consequences is a good reason to prefer one interpretation over the other. Even where the words are clear, the ordinary meaning may be rejected if it would lead to an absurdity.
4. The more compelling the reasons for avoiding an absurdity the greater the departure from ordinary meaning that may be tolerated. However, the interpretation that is adopted should be plausible.

Simply put, what is the point of enabling the MSA to ask reasonable questions and requiring employees to provide information and cooperate reasonably with the MSA if there is no way to enforce compliance?

[20] I interpret section 55 as providing the MSA with access to the business premises of a market participant for the purposes of gathering information including records, data and access to computer systems on the premises. Also, it may obtain access to information possessed by employees working on the premises. These activities may be carried out only during normal business hours of the market participant. Section 56(3) provides that if the Court is satisfied that access is necessary for the MSA to carry out its mandate, the Court may make any order it considers necessary to assist in the exercise of that access. Accordingly, where employees do not cooperate reasonably and provide the MSA with access to information to which it is entitled, the MSA may come to this Court for relief. This interpretation in my view best accords with the objects of the Act. It also avoids what would be in my view an absurd result and it is a construction which the Act can reasonably bear. I conclude that this Court may compel answers under section 56.

Are Shielding Directions Appropriate?

[21] Court proceedings are conducted in public and while this Court has discretion to order that documents be sealed and proceedings be conducted *in camera* this discretion ought to be exercised only where disclosure would subvert the ends of justice or unduly impair its proper administration. Moreover, this test applies to all discretionary Court Orders that limit public access to legal proceedings. This was recently affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. v. Ontario*, [2005] 2 S.C.R. 188. Moreover, in the case *Re Vancouver Sun*, [2004] 2 SCR 332, the Court affirmed that the presumption of openness extends to the pre-trial stage and indeed to every stage of judicial proceedings. However, the Court in the *Toronto Star* case pointed out that the test should not be applied mechanistically and it is a flexible and contextual test.

[22] The position of Enmax is that any investigation must be kept absolutely confidential, both as to the information uncovered and as to the very occurrence of an investigation.

[23] As discussed earlier, records obtained by the MSA must be kept confidential pursuant to regulations under the Act. Moreover, the MSA has adopted and published policies of confidentiality. For example, its report "MSA Investigation Procedures" dated October 5, 2006 contains the following paragraph:

The MSA will document the investigation for its own records and for use in relation to any related tribunal hearing or other such process resulting from the investigation. Subject to disclosure in the context of a hearing, or in some other process taken by the MSA to address the matters at issue, the information received, created or maintained by the MSA in relation to an investigation will remain confidential and will not be made public. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the MSA may also at its discretion publish a summary, reference or other derivative of the information received, in order to report upon an investigation in the context of its mandate.

The entire document is instructive as to how the MSA purports to carry out its mandate. Page 10 of the report reviews possible outcomes of an investigation which includes monitoring, direct action, reference to a Tribunal and of course closing the investigation. Direct action may include:

- a) Developing guidelines to mitigate the issue/conduct;
- b) Submitting recommendations to other parties if appropriate;
- c) Submitting recommendations to the Department of Energy or Minister of Energy;
- d) Working with market participants to change their conduct;
- e) Publishing a report with particulars about the complaint or referral;
- f) Referring the issue to the Chair of the EUB and request a Tribunal into the matter;
- g) Referring the matter to an outside agency if the issue does not fall completely within the jurisdiction of the MSA.

[24] Attached to the affidavit of Mr. Robert Spragins, Manager, Investigations of the MSA are a number of reports dealing with the matter which is the subject of this investigation as well as a notice to market participants. As noted by Enmax, the reports are generic in nature and do not name names except where unavoidable. The Notice to market participants sets out the MSA's view on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour with respect to electricity exchanges between Alberta and systems outside Alberta, but again it does not identify any particular market participant.

[25] Enmax's position is that the MSA can only make matters public in those few instances where the Act expressly permits it. I see nothing in the material before me which would justify taking such a restrictive view of the MSA's mandate.

[26] In a confidential letter to Enmax dated October 28, 2005, Mr. Spragins wrote the following:

Information provided to the MSA in relation to this investigation will be held in confidence to the extent required by the Act and regulations thereunder. However, all such information may potentially be used or disclosed by the MSA in accordance with its mandate (including, without limitation, in connection with this investigation, any related investigation, Tribunal hearing or other proceeding). You should therefore consider that the information is on the record and may become public. Further, the undertaking of these proceedings may also be publically disclosed by the MSA if it deems such disclosure appropriate.

[27] In support of its position that confidentiality is necessary in this instance Enmax placed before me an unfiled affidavit of Elizabeth Soria. She is the Director, Compliance for Enmax. Paragraph 4 states:

All information provided by the Respondents to the Applicant was provided on the expectation and understanding that the Applicant would make no public disclosure in the course of its investigation, including but not limited to public disclosure of:

- a) the identity of the Respondents;
- b) the information requested or exchanged; and
- c) the particular records and information provided to the Applicant to better facilitate its investigation.

Paragraph 5 goes on to say that any public disclosure of those items would significantly harm the competitive position of Enmax resulting in undue loss and also that Enmax will be irreparably prejudiced in their right to apply for confidential and *in camera* proceedings before a Tribunal if that matter is referred to one. The affidavit makes reference to the regulations cited above as well as some of the MSA's own published material related to investigation and procedures. It also references letters from Enmax, specifically putting forth its expectation that the material be kept confidential.

[28] The assertion that the competitive position of Enmax will be harmed and that it will suffer undue loss is not useful unless it is demonstrably true. When asked about this during the hearing, counsel for Enmax pointed out that there was no evidence before me to the contrary. That is not the point; general assertions ought not to be the basis for a shielding order without appropriate underlying evidence. It is certainly not readily apparent to me how Enmax's competitive position would be harmed by the public knowing that there is an ongoing investigation relating to importation into Alberta of electricity and that Enmax is one of those who imports electricity. In my view, that adds little to the already published reports on the subject which were before me. On the other hand, I agree that there is a reasonable expectation that the MSA will not disclose the information uncovered unless it is reasonably necessary to fulfill its mandate. That determination is the proper subject of the MSA's discretion which must be exercised in accordance with section 50 of the Act.

[29] As to the argument that Enmax anticipates applying for a private and confidential hearing if the matter is referred to a Tribunal, it is a factor to consider but not in my view a strong one. The issues and the material before the Tribunal will be quite different.

[30] In order to exercise my discretion to bar public access to applications such as this, the case law requires that I conclude that disclosure would "subvert the ends of justice or unduly impair its proper administration". On the other hand, the Supreme Court has recognized that the

evidentiary burden in an application to invoke the Courts aid in an investigation under the Act is not subject to the same stringent standard as an application for a publication ban at trial. Moreover, in *Vancouver Sun* the Court said at paragraph 43:

“Even though the evidence may reveal little more than reasonable expectations, this is often all that can be expected at that stage of the process and the presiding Judge, applying the *Dagenais/Mentuck* test in a contextual matter, we would be entitled to proceed on the basis of evidence that satisfies him or her that publicity would unduly impair the proper administration of justice.”

[31] This application by the MSA is but a very small ancillary step in an investigation under the Act. This application ought not to change the confidential nature of the investigation. The Act, the regulations thereunder and the published policy of the MSA all reflect confidentiality at the investigation stage. Why should the situation change because the MSA and a market participant cannot agree upon whether a question is reasonable? Indeed, if it were otherwise, a market participant might be persuaded to answer any question, however unreasonable, because information that would otherwise remain confidential might become public.

[32] Moreover, there is little or no deleterious effect. The public is getting the benefit of an independent investigation under the Act and there is no need to reveal the information thus far uncovered in order to satisfy the public that this Court has determined the reasonableness of questions to which the MSA seeks answers. If I were to make a decision based on the record as it presently exists I would be inclined to keep sealed any “record” within the meaning of the regulation and I would expect the MSA to justify making public other fruits of the investigation which, but for this application, would remain confidential. In other words, the MSA must act fairly and responsibly.

[33] In the particular circumstances of this case, I direct that the MSA re-file its application in accordance with the directions set out in these Reasons. Accordingly, I direct the Clerk of the Court return the sealed documents to the parties which filed them.

How should the MSA proceed?

[34] I have been referred to a number of cases by counsel for Enmax, the most important of which were *Hearts of Oak Assurance Company Co. v. Attorney General*, [1932] 1 A.C. 392 (H.L.) and *Baker v. Canada (Minister of Citizenship & Immigration)*, [1999] 2 S.C.R. 817.

[35] In the first case, the House of Lords sets out the two competing considerations relevant in deciding whether investigations in public should be permitted absent a clear legislative mandate: efficacy and fairness. I do not think the case adds much to what is in the Act, including section 50, which provides that “the market surveillance administrator must carry out its mandate in a fair and responsible manner”.

[36] The second case stands for the proposition that if there is a legitimate expectation that a certain procedure will be followed fairness dictates that it should be followed. To be a legitimate expectation in this context it would have to be a reasonable expectation derived from reading the Act, the regulations and the published material of the MSA. In my view, the MSA has accurately set out in its report on MSA investigation procedures the correct view as to the reasonable expectation of confidentiality based on the Act and the regulations. There are a number of tools available to the MSA to carry out its mandate other than a referral to a Tribunal. The MSA may develop guidelines, make recommendations, or publish a report. If, in the course of doing so, the MSA concludes that in order to properly carry out its mandate it ought to make public some specific incident or a specific market participant, that would be a decision the MSA is entitled to make provided it does so in a fair and responsible manner. While in the past the MSA has exercised its discretion to keep the identity of market participants confidential, that ought not to be taken as a representation that it will never do so.

[37] It is my view that it is for the MSA to decide whether its mandate is best served by making information public. That decision, however, is not immune from judicial review and such a decision ought to be made fairly and responsibly taking into consideration the legislation, the regulations and the MSA's public assurances about confidentiality during the investigative stage. These considerations do not change simply because the MSA seeks this Court's assistance under section 56 during an investigation. The Act does not require this application to be in private unlike an application under section 58 where there has been a claim for solicitor client privilege. Applications under section 56 are public. Nevertheless, the MSA ought to honour the requirement of confidentiality in the regulations and the reasonable expectations of privacy as part of its statutory duty to act fairly and responsibly.

[38] Accordingly, the MSA in seeking this Court's ruling with respect to whether the questions in this case are reasonable and therefore ought to be answered, ought not to file more confidential information than is necessary.

[39] The procedure for this application, which is set out in section 56 of the Act, is problematic. The Notice of Motion under sub-section 2 is problematic because under the Alberta Rules of Court a Notice of Motion is utilized only when there is an existing proceeding under the Rules. Of course there is no proceeding at this stage, which is why the MSA in this case issued an Originating Notice. Moreover, section 56(4) provides that an application under that section may be made without notice unless the Court otherwise orders which further muddies the waters because a Notice of Motion is normally filed with a view to serving it on somebody.

[40] Given that the process indicated in section 56 is problematic and given that much of the information is confidential, it is my view that an appropriate procedure to be used is that provided under Part 30 of the Alberta Rules of Court. While Rule 394 provides that this part should apply where no procedure is provided, I think it would also apply where the procedure provided is unclear or problematic. It also clearly applies to a proceeding under section 56(4). This procedure is extremely flexible and is in my view ideal where we are dealing with

applications where there may be extreme controversy over the use of confidential information which is certainly the case here.

[41] I believe that Rule 395 would permit the MSA to appear before a Judge of this Court with an unfiled affidavit upon notice to the market participant(s) affected. The affidavit might list the questions for which answers are sought and a generic explanation of the investigation and why the questions are relevant. In this case, for example, there are a number of public reports which are exhibits to Mr. Spragins's affidavit and which explain the nature of the investigation. There is no need to attach copies of documents that have been obtained in the investigation and which are confidential; nor is there any need in my view to attach the transcripts of interviews obtained under section 55 which are also confidential. If more material is needed for a decision, the Judge may make directions as to what material is necessary and at that time the market participant can make any application it considers necessary for a shielding order. Such a hearing would be held in a court room and would only be held *in camera* if the Judge so directed. The affidavit would be filed subject to any sealing order the presiding Judge may make.

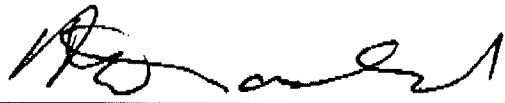
[42] In deciding what information to include in the affidavit filed on behalf of the MSA, I would expect the same degree of fairness and responsibility that the MSA has demonstrated in publishing the reports thus far with respect to this investigation. This ought to minimize any controversy with market participants. Moreover, I would not expect to see material attached as part of an affidavit which could be considered a record obtained during an investigation including transcripts of interviews. Such a record would only be disclosed if the MSA decided it was necessary and then only after reasonable notice to the market participant(s) affected in order to provide it with an opportunity to object. If this process is followed I would not anticipate many instances where shielding orders are sought.

Directions

[43] Rather than go through the originating notice and the affidavits and redact them on a paragraph by paragraph basis, it would be more effective if I directed that the MSA start over again in accordance with the directions contained in these Reasons. Accordingly, I direct that the Originating Notice be struck and the sealed documents returned to the parties who filed them. The MSA is directed to re-do an affidavit listing the questions to which answers are requested and some generic material indicating the nature of the investigation and why the information requested is relevant. After consultation with counsel for the market participant, arrangements can then be made to have the matter brought before me in open Court. After hearing from counsel, I will make any directions that I think are necessary and I will rule as to whether the questions must be answered.

[44] Counsel may make submissions in writing as to costs.

Heard on the 16th and 22nd days of February, 2007 and the 01st day of March, 2007
Dated at the City of Calgary, Alberta this 5th day of July, 2007



Alan D. Macleod
J.C.Q.B.A.

Appearances:

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