

Hawaii regulators grant access to all entities in NextEra-Hawaiian Electric merger case

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by Duane Shimogawa

The Hawaii Public Utilities Commission has granted access to all of the entities that seek have a say in the acquisition application of NextEra Energy Inc. and Hawaiian Electric Co., which is currently being reviewed by the state agency.

On Tuesday, the PUC gave the green light to 27 entities, including AES Hawaii, Blue Planet Foundation, state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, Hawaii Gas, Friends of Lanai, Hawaii Renewable Energy Alliance, Hawaii Solar Energy Association, IBEW Local 1260, Life of the Land, SunPower Corp., SunEdison, Ulupono Initiative, Sierra Club of Hawaii, Hawaii Island Energy Cooperative, Honolulu Board of Water Supply, Hina Power Corp., Tawhiri Power LLC, County of Hawaii, state Office of Planning, Earthjustice, Renewable Energy Action Coalition of Hawaii Inc., Puna Pono Alliance, and Paniolo Power.

The PUC also conditionally granted access to the acquisition case to The Alliance for Solar Choice if the lobby group is able to attain general counsel that is a member of the Hawaii State Bar Association.

TASC has about 10 days to become compliant with the PUC's general counsel rule.

"This is definitely good news as far as the Hawaii PUC welcoming a diversity of input on this set of critical issues presented in the HEI-NextEra docket," Marco Mangelsdorf, president of Hilo-based ProVision Solar, who's also a director and spokesman for Hawaii Island Energy Cooperative, told PBN in an email Tuesday. "We are pleased to get a seat at the table to represent the Big Island's interests in these proceedings."

The PUC said that it is cautioning these entities that their participation will be limited to the issues established by the state agency in this case.

"Moreover, the commission reminds all parties that it is imperative that their involvement in this docket reflect a high standard of quality, relevance and timeliness," the PUC said in the ruling. "Finally, the commission will preclude any attempts to broaden the issues or to unduly delay the proceedings, and will reconsider any intervenor's participation in this docket if, at any time during the course of this proceeding, the commission determines that any intervenor is attempting to unreasonably broaden the pertinent issues established by the commission in this docket, is unduly delaying the proceeding or is failing to meaningfully participate and assist the commission in the development of the record in this docket."

Florida-based NextEra Energy is acquiring Honolulu-based Hawaiian Electric for \$4.3 billion in a deal that's expected to close in the fourth quarter.

The acquisition case with the PUC has gained record interest, although both NextEra and HECO have tried to deny access to the case for most of these entities.

"We look forward to establishing with the PUC and all of our other stakeholders the important benefits that this merger will bring to Hawaii, our customers and the local communities we serve," Lynne Unemori, vice president of corporate relations for HECO parent, Hawaiian Electric Industries Inc., told PBN in an email Tuesday. "We remain committed to achieving our energy goals of tripling the amount of distributed solar, increasing renewable energy to 65 percent, and lowering customer bills by 20 percent. NextEra Energy supports and can help accelerate the achievement of these important goals for Hawaii."