



MICHAEL FALCO/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Jason Bak, CEO of Finavera Renewables, hopes a proposed wind project off South Africa will become a reality after a meeting in New York.

III ENERGY

B.C. upstart mingles with the elite



Invitation to the Clinton Global Initiative may be Finavera's big break, **WENDY STUECK** writes

VANCOUVER

The letter came out of the blue, bearing the letterhead of the Clinton Global Initiative and inviting small, privately held **Finavera Renewables Ltd.** to attend the organization's annual meeting this week in New York.

Jason Bak made his decision in a heartbeat.

"It didn't cross my mind for a second to say, 'no, we shouldn't go,'" said Mr. Bak, co-founder and chief executive officer of Finavera, a Vancouver-based company pursuing wind and wave energy projects in Europe, Canada and the United States.

The invitation will give Mr. Bak the opportunity to rub shoulders with the likes of Microsoft Corp. founder and philanthropist Bill Gates and United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. But more important, in agreeing to attend, Mr. Bak is also agreeing to make a commitment, either on his own or

with partners, to launch a project in one of the areas that the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) has targeted for change.

At the CGI's second annual meeting, Mr. Bak, 33, expects to find the exact parties he needs — such as investment funds and bankers willing to back unproven technology — to make his planned commitment, a wind energy project off the coast of South Africa, a reality. Members that don't follow through on their commitments are not invited back.

"They are promises, but they are promises made on a global stage with global partners," Mr. Bak said. "And in that sense, you want to make damn well sure you fulfill them."

A brainchild of globetrotting former U.S. president Bill Clinton, CGI is networking on a grand scale, aimed at creating practical solutions to global problems.

Participation, by invitation only, is limited to about 1,000 people, including heads of global finance

firms, government and religious leaders and CEOs.

Along with inspiration and good intentions, participants are expected to come up with commitments, which have ranged from financing and operating a mobile health centre for truck drivers in Africa and Asia to agreements to purchase a certain amount of power generated by renewable sources.

Nearly 300 commitments valued at over \$2.5-billion (U.S.) were inspired by the 2005 inaugural meeting, CGI says. This year's event is focused on four areas: energy and climate change, global health, poverty alleviation and mitigating religious and ethnic conflict.

Finavera will be proposing a \$40-million, 20-megawatt wave-power project off the coast of South Africa.

Such a project would help address the electricity needs of South Africa, parts of which are plagued by brownouts, and create a more sustainable energy model for developing countries, Mr. Bak said.

Mr. Bak said he hasn't yet had a chance to ask anyone at CGI how they settled on Finavera. But he suspects it may be because the company has a global focus. Mr. Bak and a partner, who both have backgrounds in the resource sector,

founded the company in 2003.

Operating on funds raised from investors and government subsidies, the company has wind and wave projects in various stages of development, including a planned 105 megawatt wind project in Ireland.

The company's wave technology, which uses offshore buoys to convert and transfer energy, is at what Mr. Bak calls a "precommercial stage" — in other words, it hasn't been proven at a level where conventional lenders are willing to back it.

Putting the technology front and centre through a CGI commitment can only help the company's goal of large-scale commercialization, he said.

Thanks to Mr. Clinton's networking clout, Mr. Bak is confident that he can meet the people he needs to make Finavera's planned commitment a reality.

"You're talking about a situation where you get to meet with people who have a huge amount of capital, who have track records in their selected industries and use the platform that's been provided to grow ourselves and to use that opportunity to create change — we didn't have to think about it for a second."

III REAL ESTATE

Realtors nix change to listing service

BY PAUL WALDIE

Realtors from across Canada have voted to shelve proposed changes to the Multiple Listing Service that many agents argued could have increased the fees consumers pay for some services.

Delegates to a special meeting of the Canadian Real Estate Association, or CREA, voted overwhelmingly yesterday to withdraw the proposed changes and seek further discussion and "input from members." A report on those discussions will be made next March during the association's annual meeting.

The proposals would have altered the rules governing how agents list homes on the MLS system, a 50-year-old service that allows agents, buyers and sellers to review virtually every home for sale in a certain market. CREA, which represents about 86,000 real estate agents, owns the MLS trademark.

Many full-service brokers argued that the MLS system is being flooded by houses from discount brokers, who generally charge far lower commissions or flat fees for their services. They said the changes were needed to protect the integrity of the service.

Discount brokers opposed the changes saying the proposals were simply an attempt by full-service agents, who dominate CREA, to protect their monopoly. The discount agents argued consumers should have a right to decide how their home is sold.

Typically full-service brokers charge a 5 per cent commission on the sale of a home and the fee is split between the agent for the buyer and the seller. Many discount brokers operate on-line and charge commissions as low as 0.5 per cent.

Ian Martin, chief executive officer of Vancouver discount broker E Realty.ca, said he was pleased the changes were not adopted. "But it's probably going to keep coming up and [full-service] realtors are going to fight tooth and nail to get this through," he said yesterday.

The federal Competition Bureau expressed worries about the changes in a letter to CREA this summer. The bureau said the rule changes could run afoul of competition laws because they might restrict competition for real estate agent service.

CREA's president, Alan Tennant, said the proposed changes were developed to protect the MLS trademark "and for no other reason."

