

New coal power stations a big no-no, minister warned

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Two new coal-powered electricity generating stations are ‘unnecessary, expensive at R10bn each and will have a disastrous impact on South Africa’.

Minister of Energy Jeff Radebe’s plan to open two new coal-powered electricity generating stations at a claimed cost of R10 billion each under the independent power producers (IPP) plan was attacked yesterday, with detractors calling it expensive, “dirty electricity” and a danger to health and the environment.

The Life After Coal/Impilo Ngaphandle Kwamalahle environmental watchdog coalition, comprising Earthlife Africa, groundWork, and the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER), said in a statement that Radebe’s plan ignored “compelling evidence about the disastrous impact these plants would have on South Africa”.

CER's Robyn Hugo said: "Last week, the Energy Research Centre released a report proving that the two new coal plants, Thabametsi and Khanyisa, would cost South Africa an additional R20 billion, and increase greenhouse gas emissions by so much that they would negate government's key plans to mitigate climate change.

"Credible modelling shows, given the large surplus generation capacity, the coal IPPs are unnecessary to meet demand and ensure security of electricity supply."

On Friday at a stakeholders meeting in Midrand, Radebe said: "A new bid round that is BW5 of the Renewable Energy IPP programme will be launched in November 2018 and it is estimated to be 1 800Mw of similar technologies as in the Expedited Bid Window. This could bring another R40 billion to R50 billion of investment into the country."

He had earlier stated that Thabametsi and Khanyisa would bring in 864Mw, another R40 billion of investment "and at least 5 000 jobs during construction".

He also noted construction could take up to 60 months "after signing before first electrons enter the grid (not before 2022-23)".

Eskom spokesperson Khulu Phasiwe said Eskom currently had an installed capacity of over 44 000Mw from its fleet of 29 power stations.

"This capacity excludes contributions from the renewable IPPs and imports from Mozambique. On average, South Africa uses about 32 000Mw during peak evening hours in winter, and Eskom has been able to meet this demand over the past three years," he said.

"While the risk of load shedding always exists, it is not likely to occur this winter as we implement plans to manage a shift in plant performance and coal-stock levels," Phasiwe said. "We have set a target to improve plant performance and are on course to achieve plant availability of 80% with 10% of units on planned maintenance and 10% on unplanned maintenance by full year 2018-19."

Phasiwe noted that Eskom's build programme would continue to be fast-tracked, with 6 382 Mw to be commissioned over the next five years.

"This includes the remaining units of Medupi power station."

Hugo said the new plants would have a significant impact on air quality and health in areas already heavily polluted, and would use enormous amounts of precious water resources.

"It is for these reasons that the Life After Coal Campaign has challenged – and will continue to challenge – all authorisations for these plants, including in high court proceedings still under way," said Hugo.

"It is imperative for South Africa's prosperity that we adopt a least-cost Integrated Resource Plan that also takes into account the costs of energy options on water, health, and climate."

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