

# AgriPulse

## Economy, health and the impact of coal power

**Elana Greyling**

DR Mike Holland recently visited South Africa for the very first time and Cape Town organised real duck weather for him, hiding the mountain under a thick blanket of clouds.

Undeterred, Mike came to launch his report on the economic impacts of coal-fired power stations on human health.

He was commissioned by groundWork, an environmental justice group, to compile this study and he presented it to health professionals at the medical council in Johannesburg.

During the presentation civil society members as part of a Life After Coal alliance meeting, officials from the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), the national air quality officer and members of the parliamentary portfolio committees for health and energy in Cape Town were in attendance.

The results of his study may not have been unexpected, but the reality of the figures are unsettling.

Mike has a background in nursing and studied economy and ecology. He loves nature and feels at home in between numbers and graphs, making environmental statistics his passion. He has worked for countries, the World Bank, the European Union and various big organisations.

**In short, his study showed the following:**

- He found pollution from coal-fired power stations rob the country of three million workdays a year due to illness. It costs the country R30 billion and directly kills 2 200 people.
- He mentioned that, for example, three of Eskom's power stations emit more SO<sub>2</sub> than the whole of Britain. One of these existing stations is Matimba in Lephalale. Add to this the new Medupi being built which will emit twice as much SO<sub>2</sub> as Britain, leaving Lephalale with an SO<sub>2</sub> pollution more than three times that of Britain.

This is without the other planned power station of which the Department of Environment have given authorisation to three already, with another three in process. This does not paint a healthy picture for the Bushveld and other areas falling into the range of the wind.

"Britain was basically the inventor of pollution," he said with a smile.

"With the start of the industrial revolution, pollution was born."

Britain had a lot of coal mines and coal-fired power stations during this revolution, leading to terrible air pollution.

"During the 1950s, because of weather patterns, smog covered London and many people died. This was a huge wake-up call for the British authorities and they have decreased their air pollution since then by huge leaps and bounds," he added.

That is why Mike has hope for South Africa.

"Even though my study shows high numbers of air pollution in the country that exceeds national and international standards, it can be decreased with the right management and governance."

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**Dr Mike Holland visited South Africa for the first time recently with him is with Letta Sekoboane from Steenbokpan near Lephalale.**