

Setback for power stations

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Government has agreed to hand over various outstanding documents relating to the environmental authorisations for two new proposed privately owned coal-fired power stations in Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

In terms of an agreement reached in the High Court in Pretoria yesterday, the government organisations agreed to hand over the documents to environmental justice organisations groundWork and Earthlife Africa, who are represented by the Centre for Environmental Rights, within the next 10 days.

The documents relate to a legal bid by the organisations to set aside the environmental authorisations of the proposed Thabametsi and Khanyisa coal-fired power stations in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, which are part of the coal-based Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (IPPs)

The coal mines are included in the draft integrated resource plan for electricity and have been highly contested by civil society and environment organisations because of the high costs involved – which would add to already increasing electricity prices for consumers – and the unacceptable impact it would have on human health, wellbeing and the environment, including water and the climate.

The Centre for Environmental Rights said the applications for access to the documents were one component of many multifaceted legal challenges being faced by the proposed coal-based IPPs.

According to the centre, the financing for these projects was already on thin ice, with Nedbank – one of the financiers for Thabametsi and Khanyisa – recently pulling its funding and First Rand and Standard Bank also reportedly considering withdrawing funding for the projects.

The organisations want to discourage the development of any new coal-fired power stations, which they say would lock SA into further dependence on dirty, expensive coal for decades and delay the need to transition to a low-carbon future.

In terms of the draft integrated resource plan for electricity, published last year, 1 000MW of new coal-based electricity will come from the two new power stations, which will be largely owned by companies from Japan, South Korea and Saudi Arabia.

The campaign contended SA did not need the electricity and the electricity, if produced, would be far more expensive than that produced from electricity sources such as renewable energy.