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Environmental activist Bobby Peek has been appointed to President Cyril Ramaphosa's Presidential Climate Change Co-ordinating Commission. | Matthews Baloyi

## Durban activist Bobby Peek plans to fight for poor on Ramaphosa's new climate commission

By [Lee Rondganger](#) 02 February 2021

ENVIRONMENTAL activist Bobby Peek is no stranger to getting his hands dirty to ensure that poor communities – often built on the doorsteps of oil refineries, coal-fired power plants and factories – have their voices heard and are treated fairly.

Peek, the director of groundWork, the Durban-based environmental lobby, who can often be found at the front of a picket line taking on giant corporations, has been appointed to President Cyril Ramaphosa's Presidential Climate Change Co-ordinating Commission which will oversee South Africa's transition to "a low-carbon, inclusive, climate change resilient economy and society".

As he has done all of his life as an activist, Peek says he aims to use his voice on the commission to ensure that affected communities have a voice in the transition to a low-carbon energy means.

“Take, for example, the issue of Engen wanting to close down the oil refinery in the south Durban basin. Engen has not denied they are going to close (it). In fact, it is imminent and quite soon – 46 months from now. When, in my understanding, Engen closes in 2023 what does that mean for the people of Durban’s south basin?” Peek asked.

He said his organisation has done a lot of work in Mpumalanga where many of the country's coal-fired power stations are located to ensure the transition to clean energy is just but there were a range of other industries including the oil and plastic industries that will be affected as the country aims to reach its climate change goals.

South Africa produces 3.5% of the world’s coal and generates 90% of its electricity from this fuel which climate change activists blame for rising sea and temperature levels around the world.

Last year the government committed to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 by focusing on renewable energy with a mixed fossil energy.

Ramaphosa’s climate change commission consists of 22 members. They come from business organisations, labour, academia and with former environment minister Valli Moosa as its deputy chairperson.

It was appointed in December and will meet four times a year for five years. It is mandated to make recommendations to government, business and civil society.

Peek said that as the government’s noble intention to move towards clean energy gathers momentum, the challenge that he faced was to ensure that the decisions being made around this issue is being informed by people on the ground.

“I can push to ensure with my colleagues that this commission engages with people affected on the ground and there is credible information from those people getting to the commission and not just technical information,” he said.

“We must remember that climate change is here and people are being affected and the poor are being affected the most and we must develop systems to protect the poor. The fossil fuel industry on the stock exchange is providing the least return on the stock market for the last decade and who will suffer the most? Not the corporates. They will get bailouts. The question we face is how to ensure a just transition that people who were forced to be dependent on these corporations, tomorrow do not become poorer because people decide that fossil fuel industry should no longer exist. We need to make sure that this process is as democratic as possible and that the future without fossil fuels serves the poor first,” Peek said.

According to the Presidency, the commission is tasked with advising on South Africa’s climate change response.

This includes mitigation and adaptation to climate change and its associated impacts.

It will also provide independent monitoring and review of South Africa's progress in meeting its emissions' reduction and adaptation goals.

Under the commission's terms of reference it will advise on and facilitate a common understanding of a just transition, cognisant of the socio-economic, environmental and technological implications of climate change. This covers adaptation, mitigation as well as means of implementation.

It will also provide a platform for the engagement of key stakeholders on the National Employment Vulnerability Assessment and Sector Job Resilient Plans and ensure reporting of progress towards the implementation of the plans.

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<https://www.iol.co.za/news/durban-activist-bobby-peek-plans-to-fight-for-poor-on-ramaphosas-new-climate-commission-20898196-76cc-40ef-b652-7173d351695a>