

South Africa Gears Up For Long Term Clean Energy

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Pretoria - South Africa's plan to build nuclear plants is not a quick fix solution to the country's energy crisis but rather a step closer to cleaner energy.

Unpacking the country's plan for a diversified energy mix during government's Infrastructure Development Cluster briefing on Tuesday, Energy Minister Dipuo Peters said her department had commenced with policies and strategies to bring life to the plan.

The plan - called the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP2010) - places specific emphasis on broadening electricity supply technologies to include gas, imports, nuclear, biomass, renewables (wind, solar and hydro), in response to both the country's future electricity needs as well as reduce its CO2 emissions.

South Africa wants to procure 3 725 MW of renewable energy through this process. According to the IRP2010 - which is a 20-year projection on electricity supply and demand - about 42% of electricity generated in South Africa is required to come from renewable resources.

As it stands, about 90% of the energy is produced from burning coal, which in turn has a negative impact on the carbon footprint.

The IRP proposes the development of new generation capacity for South Africa which takes cognisance of the need to optimise costs, promote job creation and mitigate adverse climate change.

It also makes provision for 9.6 Gigawatts of nuclear power; 6.3 GW of coal, 11.4 GW of renewable energy, and 11.0 GW of other generation sources.

In the 2012 Budget Review tabled last week, R300 billion was allocated to the energy sector over the next three years.

Responding to questions from media about the building of nuclear power plants, Peters said they would play a major role in raising supply security for the country. She said pronouncements pertaining to progress in the nuclear build programme would be made later in the year.

On concerns regarding the safety of nuclear energy in light of the recent Fukushima incident in Japan, she said this would be factored into the South African approach. Peters stressed that proper safety measures would be put in place and that they would be overseen by the appropriate expert authorities.

"After Fukushima, we went back to the drawing board to look at all safety concerns," she said, adding that they have visited various nuclear plants worldwide to better understand the technology.

The National Nuclear Energy Executive Coordination Committee (NNEECC) would "oversee" the roll-out of the nuclear build programme, and look into the decision-making about the procurement of the stations.

The NNEECC is headed by the Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe as the authority for decision-making, monitoring and ensuring general oversight of the nuclear energy expansion programme.

"The committee will make decisions in a phased manner in order to reduce the risks associated with large scale implementation of such projects," she said.

The minister said the bidding process would start in April. Asked where they will source the

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technology for the project, the minister said government, in line with Section 34, of the Electricity Regulation Act will select the vendor to build the power station in terms of energy infrastructure. The developer would then determine the source of that technology, as well as the broader engineering, procurement and construction of the plants.

In short term, the minister said they were looking at ways to reduce electricity tariff increases, as access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy services was essential to creating jobs and poverty alleviation.

Peters said an interdepartmental team was considering the best approach for determining the next round of electricity tariff increases for Eskom, due to take effect from April 2013.

This involves developing a model that seeks to balance the socio-economic impact of increasing electricity prices, the country's competitiveness, Eskom's financial viability and the necessary policy considerations for implementing the Integrated Resource Plan.

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