

# New coal-fired power stations challenged

While most of SA's attention is focused on Medupi and Kusile, little has been paid to the additional 2500MW of privately owned coal-fired electricity that the government has planned.



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The new coal energy will be sold to Eskom by those independent coal-fired power producers (IPPs) that are successful bidders in terms of the Coal Baseload Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (CBLIPPPP). These plans are, however, under threat of widespread public resistance via environmental justice organisations that are opposed to coal-fired power because of its detrimental impact on the environment and human health.

To date, groundWork (gW) and Earthlife Africa Johannesburg (ELA) - together with community partners in the Vaal, Mpumalanga Highveld and KwaZulu-Natal - have launched a legal challenge against three proposed new coal-fired power stations proposed under the CBLIPPPP. These are the 1,200MW Thabametsi power station (near Lephalale in the Limpopo); the 600MW KiPower power station (near Delmas, Mpumalanga); and the 1,050MW Colenso Power station (near Colenso in KwaZulu-Natal).

## No new investment

gW and ELA, with their community partners, argue that there should be no new investment in coal power, and that resources should be redirected to renewable energy. “Unlike dirty coal, renewable energy projects in South Africa have a track record of being built on time and within budget. Moreover, renewables do not damage the health of people and pollute water, or contribute to global warming that causes climate change,” gW director, Bobby Peek, says.

All three proposed coal-fired power stations have received authorisations from the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) prompting attorneys at the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) - representing gW, ELA and their community partners - to launch appeals to the Minister of Environmental Affairs to set aside the authorisations. The effect of the appeals is to suspend the operation of the authorisations until the appeals are decided.

“The detrimental impacts on the health of local communities, and the huge water demands of the proposed dirty coal power plants, are major grounds for the appeals,” CER attorney, Robyn Hugo, says.

## **Overburdened area**

All three proposed stations would be located in drought-disaster areas, with KiPower to be based in the Highveld, an area already so overburdened by industrial exploitation and air pollution that it has been declared an air quality priority area under the Air Quality Act. The Waterberg (where Thabametsi power station will be situated) has also been declared an air quality priority area.

According to Hugo, the environmental impact assessment process for Colenso has been conducted so hastily that many of the major impacts that the power station will have on air quality and surrounding water sources - such as the Thukela River - and greenhouse gas emissions, have not been assessed.

New investment in coal also contradicts and undermines South Africa’s commitments arising from the December 2015 climate negotiations in Paris. “South Africa, with its ample renewable energy sources, should seize the competitive advantage to lead among developing countries in the establishment of a fossil free economy. Should the appeals be refused by the Minister of Environmental Affairs, we intend to challenge those decisions in court as well,” ELA project coordinator, Dominique Doyle, concludes.

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