

NPO coalition calls on government to abandon plans for new coal-fired power, threatens legal action

Environmental and climate justice groups are calling on minister of Mineral Resources Gwede Mantashe and the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa) to abandon plans to develop 1,500 MW of new coal-fired power or face legal action.



Lethabo Power Station, a coal-fired power station owned by state power utility Eskom, is seen near a maize field near Sasolburg, South Africa, 31 January 2020. | Source: Reuters/Siphwe Sibeko/File photo

According to the non-profit organisations (NPOs), the “development of new coal-fired power is neither rational nor lawful, given the well-documented environmental, social, human health and economic impacts of new coal-powered electricity generation in South Africa”.

New coal power “unnecessary” and “unlawful”

The NPO coalition, made up of the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER), African Climate Alliance (ACA), the Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action (VEM) and groundWork (GW), sent a [letter of demand](#) to minister Mantashe on Friday, 17 September.

The letter highlights global scientific consensus on coal and climate change, citing the recently published Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report on the physical science basis of climate change.

It also refers to the two locally-focused expert reports, of which the first details the “unnecessary cost of new coal-fired electricity generation”, and the second demonstrates that “building new coal power in circumstances where there are cleaner, cheaper and feasible alternatives would result in unacceptable harm and simply makes no sense”.

Advocacy and action coordinator at the ACA, Sarah Farrell, says new coal-fired power will also “add to global warming and cause air and water pollution”, burden South Africa with “unnecessarily expensive electricity and cause long-term negative effects for human health”.



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Nicole Loser, programme head for pollution and climate change at CER, said the government’s plans for new coal-fired electricity also directly contradict Section 24 of the Constitution.

“New coal-fired power flies in the face of our Constitutional right to an environment not harmful to health and wellbeing, not only for the present generation, but for future generations too. This is especially so because the government has alternative solutions at its disposal - alternative solutions which would not pose this threat to human rights,” Loser said.

The NPOs have given minister Mantashe and Nersa until Friday, 8 October to respond to their letter of demand.

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