

IRP will bring certainty

There will be certainty about the country's energy mix after the long-awaited Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) is presented to cabinet next week, Minerals and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe promised at the Windaba 2019 conference in Cape Town.

 By Nicci Botha 9 Oct 2019



Gwede Mantashe

He said that the emphasis was on the different power technologies complementing each other and not pitting them against each other. "One sector that is growing is renewables. So there is no reason to go to to create space. The space is there. The country is committed to a sustainable energy mix that is modular and which it can afford."

Under the government's renewable energy independent power producers (IPP) procurement programme, green power now comprises 4.5% of SA's energy supply. While more green power is committed to in the IRP.

In the first quarter of 2019 the economy contracted by 3.2%; with energy making a negative contribution to the GDP. The key factors behind the decline were the load shedding and the high electricity price.

Building an infrastructure

There has been a gradual decline in electricity demand. This, together with low economic activity and increasing electricity tariffs close the supply-demand gap. "Manganese refineries have been mothballed because the cost of our electricity is uncompetitive. Manganese is being sent to Taiwan and China to be beneficiated. What do we do to bring these commodities to be beneficiated here?"

"The issue is what contribution do we make to revitalise the economy? We must begin with the infrastructure to meet the demands of industrialisation."

"It would be most stupid to wait for all the old power stations to be decommissioned before starting the new build programme. The answer is a diversity of energy sources."

Managing the transition

Mantashe said he has been accused of being a coal fundamentalist, given his previous comments on keeping coal in the mix, but he sees himself rather as “a fundamentalist about security of energy supply”.

Although the country is committed to meeting its climate change objectives, abandoning coal power outright will see South Africans “breathe fresh air in darkness”, he said.

The minister also pointed out the need for a well-managed transition from one power technology to another. Society does not go from one extreme to another. Without the power station, Hendrina [in Mpumalanga] would become a ghost town. So we have to look at what that transition would look like.”

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.
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