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CER lauds court halting Thabametsi power station plans

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Photo by: Bloomberg

The Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) says major climate impacts and exorbitant costs have managed to sound the death

knell for one of the last new proposed coal-fired power stations in South Africa.

The environmental organisation's statement follows the successful setting aside of plans for the Thabametsi power plant in court, after litigation launched by environmental justice groups Earthlife Africa and GroundWork in 2016.

The organisations had been challenging the Thabametsi power station since the then Department of Environmental Affairs issued the plant's environmental authorisation in February 2015.

Earthlife and GroundWork argued in court papers that the then Environment Minister had disregarded the devastating climate impacts of the 557 MW Thabametsi project, which was originally approved for a capacity of 1 200 MW.

The setting aside of Thabametsi's environmental authorisation means that, should it still plan to proceed, it would have to seek a new authorisation from the the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, which is a major setback for the project.

Last month, South Korea's State-run Korea Electric Power Corp, Kepco, announced its withdrawal from its 50% stake in the Thabametsi project.

Earlier this week, it was reported that both the Public Investment Corporation and the Industrial Development Corporation had also withdrawn their financing, and the Development Bank of Southern Africa was quoted as saying that it was reassessing the project to determine if it was in-line with its policy of a "just transition towards a low-carbon economy".

All South Africa's private banks have already withdrawn their pledged funding for the project.

"In an environment where renewable energy is much cheaper than coal, any new investment in coal power is completely unjustifiable.

"That is over and above the unconscionable health and environmental costs of coal, which are being borne by communities living in all our coal areas in Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal," says Earthlife Africa director **Makoma Lekalakala**.

Thomas Mnguni, GroundWork community coal campaigner, agrees, stating that this is a victory for environmental justice, the just transition and open democracy.

Had it proceeded, Thabametsi would have been one of the most greenhouse gas emission-intensive coal-fired power stations in the world and would have cost South Africa R12.57-billion.

In terms of some institutions still being willing to finance clean coal projects, CER attorney **Nicole Loser** says clean coal is a myth. “There is no version of coal-fired power that curbs greenhouse gas emissions, or adequately mitigates all the harms of coal-fired power to the extent it is required.

“In any event, the additional costs of this technology make already-expensive coal completely uncompetitive with cheaper clean energy sources.” ■■

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