

It's time for South Africans to face reality

By Kevin Mileham, DA Shadow Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy

Chairperson,

At the outset, we need to acknowledge a few realities.

Reality number 1: Rolling blackouts have been with us for 15 years, and we are no closer today to resolving them than we were in 2007, when they first emerged. In fact, one could go so far as to say that we are actually in a far worse situation now, than we were then, because of the sheer mismanagement of our energy policy.

Reality number 2: ESKOM has admitted that it would require investment of R990 billion in new generation to resolve our electricity crisis. This is money they admit they don't have and cannot afford to borrow. Which means it has to come from outside of ESKOM and outside of government. That means Independent Power Producers.

Reality number 3: Our people are already enormously affected by climate change and harmful emissions. Just ask the people of KwaZulu-Natal about their ongoing problems arising from the floods last year, or the children of Mpumalanga who suffer respiratory ailments because of the enormous amounts of harmful emissions pumped out by ESKOM's coal-fired power stations.

Reality number 4: South Africa has international commitments in terms of the Paris Agreement, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and loan agreement conditions, all of which place a huge obligation on the country to reduce our carbon emissions.

Reality number 5: Even if we wanted to ignore everything I have just said, the fact of the matter is that it would take too long to build new coal and nuclear power plants. We have seen (with the construction of Medupi and Khusile – neither of which is fully operational or up to scratch in terms of technical standards or emission control requirements) that it would take in the region of 15 years for ESKOM to build plants like these.

So where does that leave us? If we are to truly address the energy and electricity needs of this country, then we need to **accelerate** the building of new generation capacity. If we accept that

ESKOM cannot do this, then we **must** look to independent power producers to invest, build and operate this generation. We know that there is no appetite either amongst power companies or finance institutions to build fossil fuel power generation. Which therefore means that we **must** look to renewables – wind, solar and hydro – to create electricity solutions for South Africa.

A Just Energy Transition – in other words, a move from the current status quo of primarily nuclear and coal generation to an electricity sector dominated by renewable energy solutions – must, however, take into account the impact on the socio-economic circumstances of those most affected.

In a strict, limited reading of who this affects, we would be talking about the ESKOM workers, the coal miners and the coal transporters and the communities they support and live in. But a more realistic and inclusive interpretation includes every single South African. It includes the communities who suffer without electricity for days on end because of rolling blackouts. It includes the children whose lungs are clogged with harmful carbon emissions. It includes the economy, and the rampant unemployment and a lack of economic growth which has resulted from this government's go-slow on the adoption of renewable solutions.

We must ask ourselves: is it truly just to leave people suffering in cold and darkness because this government hasn't done its job?

We need to bring more electricity online now, not in 15 years' time! A real Just Energy Transition is one that builds new generation capacity quickly, efficiently and cost-effectively. It is one that looks at the greater good of the people of South Africa, not the limited, selfish needs of the few who are directly part of the current status quo.