

Thursday, 26 September 2013

Tomorrow in Stockholm, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [1] will be releasing the first installment of its Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). This report focuses on the science of climate change and provides further proof that human activities, through the production of greenhouse gases, are the cause of climate change. Burning coal for the generation of electricity is a leading source of greenhouse gases.

"The only logical conclusion to draw from an understanding of the science of climate change, as described in the IPCC's AR5, is that we have to stop building coal-fired power stations in order to mitigate climate change," says Makoma Lekalakala, Programme Officer at Earthlife Africa Johannesburg [2]. "To continue building coal-fired power stations will guarantee our transition from our current climate to an extremely hostile and inhabitable world of four to five degrees warming before the end of this century. We are already seeing the harsh effects of rising temperatures in the form of extreme weather events such as floods and hurricanes, rising sea levels and melting ice caps."

In other words, one cannot understand the science behind climate change and then see the building of new coal-fired power stations as a logical response to climate change. Yet, this is exactly the position Eskom is taking in deciding, to build another coal-fired power station, dubbed Coal 3. The new proposal of a 4800MW coal-fired power station the size of Medupi or Kusile – putting it in the top five largest in the world – will produce about 25 million tons (Mt) of carbon dioxide (CO₂) a year, 1500Mt over its 60 year lifespan.

According to the National Climate Change Response Policy and as part of its global commitments and its Constitutional requirement to ensure an environment that is not harmful to the health and well-being for all citizens, the government has put an upper limit of what they will allow to be emitted at 614Mt of CO₂-eq [3] in 2036. Of this they have put a cap on the electricity sector of 275Mt of CO₂-eq. Government's ideal peak emissions in 2025 they say would stand at 398Mt CO₂-eq. Our 2010 emissions stood at 547Mt of CO₂-eq, and Eskom produced 231.9Mt of CO₂ last year. Together, if one accounts for Coal 3, and Kusile and Medupi's emissions, which government chooses to ignore, it will put South Africa's emissions above the 614Mt limit.

"It is evident that Eskom and government don't understand the science behind climate change and peoples' health. They do not care about the climate, humanity's future, and in fact the lives of local communities who stand to face the brunt of the air, water and health impacts from Coal 3," states Bobby Peek, Director at groundWork [4]. "Eskom and government must read the IPCC's AR5 report and adjust its world outlook, especially since we, as Africans, are set to suffer the worst from global climate change, as Africa's temperature will rise 1.5 times more than the global average."

groundWork, Earthlife Africa Jhb and Greenpeace Africa will be protesting outside various Eskom offices on Friday. The organisations will be pointing out

to Eskom that with the release of the AR5 report, the time to quit new coal is now. Coal 3 is an inappropriate choice for South Africa or any other country; the science is incontrovertible.

Greenpeace (and some Earthlife Africa protesters) will be going to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to handover a letter to Minister Rob Davies, who despite his department previously supporting renewable energy was the Minister that announced Coal 3.