

SA will not appeal nuclear plant suspension

Not cancelled, merely suspended, but still not a good move to develop a high efficiency and safer plant than the LWRs.

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South Africa's department of environmental affairs said today it will not appeal a court decision suspending a government plan to develop a highly advanced nuclear power reactor near Cape Town. Instead, it said it will address the court's concerns, which include allowing environmental groups more time to make their views heard.

The ruling last month by the Cape High Court followed objections from environmentalists to the proposed multi-billion rand project and a court challenge from lobby group Earthlife Africa in November.

The pebble bed modular reactor (PBMR) is an advanced design that claims to dramatically improve safety and efficiency, but environmentalists say it is unsafe and creates excessive radioactive waste.

The government had given power utility Eskom the go-ahead to build a pilot reactor near the site of its only existing nuclear power plant to help meet rising demand for power, forecast to outstrip supply within three years. But the court ruled that environmental groups must be given further opportunity to comment on the project.

"The department of environmental affairs...today announced its intention not to appeal the decision of the Cape High Court," the department said in a statement.

"The court decision stands and environmental groups will be given more time to comment on the project. But the PBMR project is still on track," said J.P. Louw, the environmental affairs spokesperson. But the department believes the current environmental impact assessment process is too cumbersome and that new, streamlined regulations it hopes to implement soon will remove some of the hurdles that stand in the way of big projects.

About 6% of the country's power output is generated through the existing Koeberg nuclear plant, while 88% is sourced by coal. – Reuters