

Cape nukes Koeberg plan

July 23 2009 at 06:25AM

By Anel Lewis

The City of Cape Town has refused to approve a revised study plan to build a new nuclear plant at Koeberg, saying "critical issues" about residents' safety in a nuclear emergency and the removal of high-level nuclear waste have been ignored.

"As the city, we reject the responses from the environmental consultants. We have highlighted the critical issues and these must be included as conditions before any approval is given," said mayoral committee member for finance Ian Neilson.

The city council submitted comment on the draft scoping report last year.

But Neilson said yesterday the responses from Arcus Gibb, the consultants responsible for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and its plan of study, were "unacceptable".

Neilson said he feared that a "record of decision" would be granted without the project being subject to any conditions.

The EIA is one of the legal requirements needed before approval can be granted.

Eskom proposed in 2007 to develop a pressurised water reactor nuclear power station at one of five sites in the Northern, Western and southern Cape. Duinefontein or Koeberg is one of three preferred sites. The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism approved the final scoping report in November but called for a revised study plan for the EIA.

The revised plan, which includes Eskom's decision to have one EIA process for a fleet of nuclear power stations at the three sites and to exclude the "no go option" of not building the plants, has been opened for public comment.

Neilson said the city was concerned that the revised plan did not give Eskom responsibility for the removal of nuclear waste from the site.

The current Koeberg power station placed significant restrictions on the city's natural expansion towards the north. It also affected the cost of roads and other services needed to ensure that residents could be evacuated if there was a nuclear emergency. This impact was not considered in the assessment of Koeberg for a second nuclear plant.

EIA consultant Arcus Gibb said in its response that the buffer zones would be done by the National Nuclear Regulator (NNR) as part of the licensing process.

As Nuclear 1, as the plant is known, would have the latest design technology, a buffer zone of only 3km would be needed. But as there was no guarantee that the NNR would accept this specification, a 5km evacuation zone would be considered in the EIA. Monitoring of radiation in the area would be done and reported to the NNR.

When asked about safety measures, the consultant said it was "an issue that the NNR would still have to address".

Any external costs associated with emergency planning would be agreed by the city council, the NNR and Eskom once the emergency plan was finalised.

The storage of high-level nuclear waste and the effects it would have on residents' health would be dealt with in specialist studies and assessed in the EIA, said Arcus Gibb.

Eskom estimated that up to 7 000 people would be employed at the peak of the plant's construction. While the provision of accommodation would be the responsibility of the supplier, the city and Eskom would have to discuss any plans, said the consultant.

The city wanted clarity on its role in applications for the rezoning of the rural site so that it could be used

to allow for electricity generation. Arcus Gibb said the rezoning process would be done separately from the EIA.

anel.lewis@inl.co.za

http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=139&art_id=vn20090723023139225C137844#more