

Power assessment standards urged

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The Energy Ministry plans to endorse a new report, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA), to set a new norm for supporting future power plants, with the aim to reduce local opposition to such facilities.

A new SEA report will soon be commissioned for the two delayed coal-fired power plants in the southern region of Thailand, meaning the ministry hopes to restart these two projects once again.

Nantika Thangsuphanich, deputy permanent secretary of energy, said a ministry committee has announced it is seeking new organisations to conduct the SEA report, which will cover any energy projects with potentially major environmental impacts, such as steel furnace production, hydro-power and nuclear power plants.

"The committee has resolved to carry out an SEA report on the two coal power plants in the South, covering environmental impact, community impact, economic profit, and project viability," she said.

An SEA report is expected to cost roughly 50 million baht per project, with the budget coming from the Energy Regulatory Commission.

The time frame to complete a report is expected to be roughly nine months before it is submitted to energy policymakers for

them to make a final decision.

The ministry will launch terms of reference for interested organisations on its website on Sept 14, and they must submit documents for conducting the study during Sept 17-Oct 5.

"We will come to a resolution within the next five months on whether the two coal-fired power plants are to be located in the southern region," Ms Nantika said.

The development of the two coal-fired power plants in Krabi and Songkhla has been postponed several times during 2014-17, even though both projects underwent complete environmental and health impact assessment reports.

Policymakers then delayed the two projects after vociferous opposition from local groups.

Ms Nantika said the SEA report will help determine whether the southern province should have more coal-fired power plants. If not, the policymakers will form an alternative plan to seek new resources or power supply systems to generate electricity for the region.

The SEA study will consist of many experts in related fields. All positions are expected to be appointed within a month of the study's launch.

Manoon Siriwan, an energy expert, said there are two natural-gas power plants in the southern region — Chana district in Songkhla and Khanom district in Nakhon Sri Thammarat — with a capacity of 2,500 megawatts.

There are also renewable power plants — hydro, biomass and wind — with a combined capacity of 382MW.

The two contested coal-fired power plants have been envisioned since 2014 under the national power development plan for 2015-36.

The 800MW plant, to be located in Krabi, was initially scheduled to begin commercial operations in 2019. The 2000MW plant, to be situated in Thepha district, Songkhla, was targeted to launch some time in 2021-22.

In related news, Bangchak Corporation will become the largest shareholder in Okea after the Norwegian oil firm buys some Shell assets off Norway, Okea's chief executive said yesterday.

The Thai firm will take a 45-49% stake in Okea after committing about a billion kroner to the previously announced 4.5-billion-kroner deal to buy Shell's stakes in the Draugen and Gjoea fields, Erik Haugane told Reuters.



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