

Green Connection: Energy budget still reeks of too much fossil fuel

Mineral resources and energy minister, Gwede Mantashe's energy budget continues to place too much emphasis on oil and gas - neither of which are valid transition fuels that reduce the country's carbon emissions. Not only does the use of gas threaten to derail South Africa's efforts to meet its conditions of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, but it is also a major threat to the environment and wellbeing of citizens.



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"The International Energy Agency (IEA) recognises this hazard. Today, the IEA set out its net-zero emissions pathway. In addition, a month ago, the Green Connection also released a startling research report on the effects of methane gas (CH₄) emissions on the environment. Methane is the second largest cause of global warming and according to our geologist, while it gets less attention than carbon dioxide (CO₂), as a greenhouse gas (GHG), methane makes up the greatest portion of natural gas (also called fossil gas). Therefore, reducing methane emissions will be critical if we hope to avoid the worst effects of climate change," says Neville van Rooy, Green Connection's community outreach coordinator.



Shale gas pockets found in the Karoo, Mantashe says

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"So, the big question is, especially for South Africans living in our coastal communities and others who will be negatively affected, why is Mantashe determined to go backwards into a fossil fuel past, rather than catapult us into a socially-inclusive renewable energy future? From our perspective, the minister is ignoring lessons from the past and, therefore, holding the country back, sabotaging the futures of younger citizens who still have their whole lives ahead of them," he says.

He says that the 2019 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP2019) – South Africa's energy roadmap – earmarks 13,600MW of renewable energy, by 2027. Why is Mantashe doing less renewables but determined to do 3,000MW of gas, which will set us back from our climate goals?

Not only should the minister be compelled by evidence-based data, but he should also be motivated by common sense and the desire to do what is in the greater public interest. The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) should rather push for more renewables, in conjunction with research for renewables innovation and development, rather than in oil and gas.

“Our stance on this issue is clear. We do not want oil and we do not want gas. What we do want is for our government to wake up to the reality of the climate crisis and rather promote a clear path toward a net-zero future that is carbon free. We remain very concerned about our government – all the way up to President Ramaphosa – preaching commitment to climate change but who do the complete opposite. The oil and gas development rush around our coast is neither democratic nor inclusive. Those communities who will be affected are all but completely ignored. Their rights to be involved in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are totally violated. Do not even talk about the risks to their livelihoods nor the further trampling on their human rights.



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“What we find most frustrating, is this elderly minister boasting about old-school energy prospects, like gas discoveries, while ignoring calls from local communities for more sustainable solutions that not only protect their marine environment but also their livelihoods and their ability to put food on the table. We cannot keep going for dirty, polluting fossil fuels, while we face the intensifying climate crisis. The time has come for new solutions. New thinking," he says.

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