

# COP17 THE MERCURY

UN 17th CONFERENCE OF PARTIES  
Climate change conference 2011

Monday, December 5, 2011

Published daily in  
The Mercury during COP17

'GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR RENEWABLES IS CRUCIAL'

## Green energy has many challenges

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**R**ENEWABLE energy may be the key to a safer future, but many aspects still need to be resolved before it can come into its own as an alternative source for powering our industrial society.

The difficulties are particularly evident in SA as it tries to chart the way to a greener future. One of the biggest steps forward on this road will be the announcement the government is expected to make at the COP17 climate change talks in Durban this week regarding its Renewables Initiative.

Planning for the project has been going on for several years, and from all indications the renewable-energy strategy is going to be implemented step-by-step, rather than in leaps and bounds.

The financial complexities, in particular, have been highlighted at a workshop run as a side-event to COP17 by the International Renewable Energy Agency (Irena) in partnership with SA's Ministry of Energy, the SA Renewables Initiative (Sari) and the International Institute for Sustainable Development.



One of the challenges described was how to fit the development of a renewable-energy sector with the country's crucial requirement of job-creation. Another was what factors to take into account in calculating the difference in the costs associated with coal-fired power generation and renewable energy, as the price of renewables was often cited as a critical factor.

The biggest challenge singled out, however, was how to get the green-energy sector on to a footing that would assure investors, suppliers and the market of its long-term viability and growth.

Gerrit Kruijswijk, the green industry specialist at the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), a

Mounted metro police keep a close eye on proceedings outside the COP17 venue in Durban yesterday.

PICTURE: KOPANO TLAPE

major prospective sponsor of the sector's development, noted that green energy generation did not by itself sustain many jobs. These came from the development of the technologies and the production of the parts.

The problem was that, while SA could, for instance, make the blades and structures, the technology for wind, as for solar, power remained highly sophisticated.

Saliem Fakir, head of the Living Planet Unit of WWF SA, made the case for taking a hard look at the respective costs of coal-fired

and renewable energy, as the latter continued to be hampered by misconceptions about the difference.

Both coal and nuclear-driven energy were massively costly to develop, and the price of coal was uncertain. But it was time that the cost of the fresh water used in the cooling process and of the carbon released into the atmosphere in the case of coal be brought into the reckoning. It needed to be understood as well that the more green technology got used, the better the sector would get at it.

Sakkie Leimecke, Nedbank's

lead principal on energy, said the government had been playing a significant role in getting the green programme going. But unless there was going to be a significant intervention on the part of government in spearheading development, the market would be slow to respond.

The high cost of capital and the reliance on expensive foreign expertise were inhibiting factors. There needed to be more certainty, and the government had a critical role in creating that assurance.

Uncertainty on the part of sup-

pliers forced up their charges, and a price had to be paid as well for flying in foreign experts for individual projects. Localisation was critical. It also needed to be proved to the market that the sector's development was sustainable.

It was also vital to maintain energy security. This meant achieving a balance between coal and renewable energy.

There needed to be a secure base load which could only come from coal and nuclear generation, as wind and solar were vulnerable to natural fluctuations.

# Cooling down the Earth through geoengineering

Melanie Gosling

AS WORLD governments show little decisive action to curb greenhouse gases, scientists are now looking at "plan B" – massive and controversial manipulation of the planet's environment to help cool the Earth.

It is known as geoengineering and, according to CSIR climate scientist Bob Scholes, it ranges from the wacky to the mundane

to the downright dangerous.

Speaking at a panel discussion at COP17, Scholes said there had been insufficient action on cutting greenhouse gases. Geoengineering was being discussed in the scientific community as an option to help combat climate change, but many of the proposals carried a high level of uncertainty as to whether they worked and, more importantly, what level of risk they carried. Because of this, the Inter-

governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was evaluating the research on geoengineering.

The IPCC report was released in London last week and has been discussed at COP17.

"Some geoengineering is deeply flaky – like putting up giant parasols to shade the Earth. Some are mundane – plant lots more forests. Some are really scary – for instance, a jet flying through the stratosphere spewing out sulphur

dioxide. This forms tiny crystals that are shiny and cause the sun's rays bounce off them, resulting in a cooling effect."

However, the danger was that, if this project went ahead, but for some reason was interrupted for just one year, the greenhouse gases that had built up in the interim could result in the average global temperature rocketing to 6°C in one year – with devastating consequences for human civilisation.

## More from COP17

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## Sustainability and Climate Change

*If you are not doing it, who is?*

As regulatory pressures build, sustainability and climate change strategy is becoming a cornerstone of business strategy. Understanding how a business performs on a sustainability scale will provide opportunities to assess risks and the impact of those risks; as well as identify opportunities that the changes in regulations and legislation hold for business.

Deloitte has a dedicated Sustainability and Climate Change team that is well positioned to address the multi-faceted challenges of assembling a sustainability and climate change strategy.

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