

# Calif. regulators approve natural gas to replace nuclear plant

**Anne C. Mulkern, Environment & Energy Publishing, 3-13-14**

New natural gas plants can be built to replace the power lost with the closure of the San Onofre nuclear power plant in Southern California, under a decision today by the state's utility regulator.

The California Public Utilities Commission on a 5-0 vote approved a blueprint outlining how utilities San Diego Gas & Electric Co. (SDG&E) and Southern California Edison Co. (SCE) can add new electricity sources.

It authorized the utilities combined to procure between 1,000 and 1,500 megawatts of new power by 2022. Of that, 600 MW must come from "preferred resources," which include energy efficiency, renewable power, battery storage and conservation. The decision authorized the utilities to purchase up to 800 MW from "any source."

The plan approved included a last-minute change from an earlier proposal. It allows SDG&E to procure up to 600 MW of new gas power plants, 100 MW more than in the proposed decision. It authorized SDG&E to enter two-sided negotiations for fossil fuel projects, instead of putting out requests for offers, which environmental activists said is more transparent.

The commissioners said it was necessary to guarantee reliability. San Onofre generated 2,200 MW and delivered electricity to 1.4 million homes.

"I live in Southern California, unlike my four colleagues here," said Michael Peevey, president of the Public Utilities Commission. "I would like nothing better than to have no gas-fired generation.

"We just cannot meet the absence of 2,200 MW of power from [San Onofre] 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with all preferred resources. ... We just don't have it in the time frame necessary to ensure ... the economic well-being, prosperity and keeping the lights on in Southern California."

Commissioner Mike Florio said that "realistically a significant amount" of the replacement power could come from gas-fired resources.

"Even if there is as much as 2,400 MW of gas, that's still vastly less than the gas plants that will be closing over the next several years due to once-through cooling regulations," he said, referring to rules barring plants from using ocean and other nearby water for cooling.

"The simple reality is that no one in the world has managed to run a complex electric grid like the one we have in Southern California" without having fossil energy for contingencies, he said.

## Green groups wanted clean energy

Environmental groups had pushed for replacing the lost electricity with energy efficiency, renewable power and conservation.

While the CPUC's final plan requires that some of the replacement energy come from renewable sources, "the utilities will ultimately get to choose where the bulk of the energy comes from, which could include natural gas," said a coalition including Earthjustice, the Sierra Club and the California Environmental Justice Alliance.

SDG&E, the alliance said, "has already begun to lay the groundwork for a new gas plant in Carlsbad."

Carlsbad is a coastal community at the northern end of San Diego County, about 25 miles south of the San Onofre plant.

"We are outraged at this decision," said Strela Cervas, co-coordinator with the California Environmental Justice Alliance. "The CPUC is allowing far too much new energy generation that we don't need."

It leaves the door open, Cervas said, "for the vast majority of that energy to be produced with polluting fossil fuels, at the expense of our wallets and our health. These dirty gas plants are likely to end up in low-income communities of color who have been clamoring for local clean energy. This decision completely circumvents the public's input."

Before the vote, activists addressed the CPUC, imploring the agency not to approve the proposed decision allowing natural gas plants.

"I'm carrying a lot of anger from people in San Diego about the revisions to the San Onofre decision," said Peter Hasapopoulos of Escondido, in San Diego County. "The revisions to the proposed decision, bumping up the authorized megawatts for SDG&E, which seems to coincide with the natural gas plant they want to build in Carlsbad, Calif., is astounding and outrageous to myself and a lot of people in San Diego."

Hasapopoulos said city councils from the coastal cities of Del Mar, Solana Beach and Encinitas had sent letters to the commission urging no more natural gas plants. New plants would thwart development of locally generated renewable power, he said.