

Citizens launch administrative lawsuit to stop JERA from constructing Yokosuka coal-fired power plant

Plaintiff Group and Legal Team for Plaintiff Group,

Yokosuka Coal-Fired Power Plant Lawsuit

On May 27, 2019, 45 citizens launched an administrative lawsuit in Tokyo District Court with the national government as defendant. They are seeking cancellation of the notice of finalization of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) for the construction of two new coal-fired generating units (650 MW x 2 units, totaling 1,300 MW) planned by Japan's energy behemoth JERA Co. at the site of its Yokosuka thermal power plant, facing Tokyo Bay south of Yokohama.

The lawsuit is calling on the government to cancel a notice of EIA finalization that was issued by the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which cleared the way for the coal power plant to move ahead to the construction phase. The ministry didn't request any changes in the EIA in terms of preventing impacts from CO2 emissions (approx. 7.26 million tons annually) and air pollutants from the proposed new generating units.

Rikuro Suzuki, Representatives for Plaintiff Group said, "Whatever personal effort citizens make to cut CO2 emissions day to day, we will never stop climate change if big coal power plants continue to be built. Yokosuka is the sole remaining coal plant slated for construction in the Tokyo Bay area. Promoting coal power is going in the wrong direction. We should stop it."

The impacts of climate change are becoming a living reality, as people experience ever-increasing occurrences of torrential rains, flood damage and heatstroke due to extreme weather. To hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 1.5 to 2°C above pre-industrial levels, the Paris Agreement has set a long-term goal of net zero CO2 emissions by early in the second half of this century. The electrical power sector is the largest source of emissions and is being called upon to phase out power generation from coal. While the UK, Canada, Germany and other countries are making steps forward with the coal phase out, Japan has not yet placed any effective restrictions on coal. After the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident in March 2011, plans were made for 50 new units at coal power plants in Japan. Some plans have subsequently been canceled, but 25 units are still at either the assessment or construction phase. Besides the climate concerns, many residents living in the Tokyo Bay area are also concerned about health impacts if the units are constructed at Yokosuka.

The Yokosuka thermal power plant site previously had a total of eight oil- or gas-fired units, but except for Units 3 and 4 (total 700 MW, oil-fired), almost all had stopped operating for twenty years and by 2010 all had stopped. Units 3 and 4, as well as two gas turbines, were restarted for a while after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, but since 2014 none of the units have been operating.

Meanwhile, the 1,300 MW total coal-fired power projects targeted by this lawsuit did not go through the regular EIA process. JERA exploited a “replacement/upgrade” assessment process newly introduced by the government after the Fukushima disaster, thereby benefiting from simplified and fast-tracked EIA procedures. The Minister of METI recently finalized the EIA stage, so JERA is now attempting to start construction in August 2019.

The plaintiffs are asserting that the simplified assessment process was illegal. They emphasize that the expansion and new construction plans are unacceptable due to the failure of the government to conduct an adequate impact assessment. The lawsuit represents people who are fighting to protect the health and living environment of children and grandchildren in the future.

Contact

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