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South Africa launches 5,200 MW nuclear build programme

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South Africa's Department of Electricity and Energy is advancing a 5,200 MW nuclear expansion programme, with state utility Eskom having submitted its feasibility study under the country's Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) 2025. Minister Dr Kgosientsho Ramokgopa confirmed the development at the South African Nuclear and Clean Energy Conference in Pretoria, where he outlined the government's intent to move from policy to procurement on new nuclear capacity.

The Minister stated that his department is preparing a formal determination for public participation, describing the publication of that determination as a statutory trigger for procurement. Under the existing Nuclear Energy Policy, Eskom is designated as the owner and operator of any new nuclear plants, with the programme structured as a public-private partnership in which Eskom retains operational control. The National Nuclear Regulator will exercise independent authority over safety and licensing.

Ramokgopa drew explicit lessons from South Africa's troubled construction of the Kusile and Medupi coal-fired power stations, describing those projects as a template of poor planning that the nuclear programme must not repeat. He stressed that public consultation would be conducted on scientific and technical merit rather than ideological grounds, and that submissions would be evaluated on evidence-based criteria.

A significant human capital challenge was acknowledged openly. South Africa has not constructed a nuclear power station in approximately 50 years, and the Minister

conceded that engineers and technicians with direct nuclear construction experience are scarce domestically. Personnel currently operating the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station near Cape Town possess operational expertise but not construction expertise, which the Minister identified as one of the programme's most material inherent risks. Addressing this skills deficit will require deliberate investment in training and, potentially, international technical partnerships.

The broader economic rationale for the programme centres on South Africa's chronic electricity shortage, which the Minister argued suppresses manufacturing output, deters new investment, and raises the cost of power across the economy. The IRP 2025 frames new nuclear capacity as a long-term baseload solution to close the gap between available generation and the demand levels required to support industrial growth and broader household electrification. No timeline for the public participation process or a final procurement determination was specified at the conference.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

The programme remains at the pre-procurement stage — a feasibility submission and a pending public participation determination — so the appropriate posture is monitoring and early relationship-building rather than procurement outreach. Norwegian companies with nuclear construction supply-chain capabilities, specialist engineering services, or project management expertise should track the statutory determination publication as the trigger for active engagement. The acknowledged skills deficit and public-private partnership model suggest openings for technology transfer agreements and long-term service partnerships once procurement formally opens.

PARTNER ANGLES

- **Service:** Project management and construction assurance firms can position early given the government's explicit concern about repeating Kusile/Medupi planning failures.
- **Drilling:** Site investigation and geotechnical drilling contractors should monitor site-selection announcements ahead of civil works mobilisation.

- **Pipeline:** Process piping and cooling-system infrastructure specialists should track the procurement determination for future tender opportunities.
- **LNG:** Limited direct relevance at this stage; monitor to assess whether gas-to-power remains in the generation mix alongside nuclear under IRP 2025.
- **Subsea/FPSO:** No direct relevance to this nuclear programme; focus remains on offshore oil and gas opportunities elsewhere on the continent.

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