

# WIND POWER BLOWING HARD

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THE WIND of change is blowing through the energy generation industry in the Cape.

The Department of Energy on Monday announced the group of preferred bidders selected from the second bidding window of its renewable energy independent power producers (IPP) programme.

The R100 billion programme is expected to jumpstart SA's renewable energy industry, take pressure off energy constraints and offer sustainable alternatives.

The programme's expansion is considered one of the most important new industries in its benefit for the environment and SA's business climate regarding job growth, foreign investments and revenue building.

Seven preferred bids were selected for developing wind energy projects in the Eastern and Western Cape.

Windlab Developments SA, a subsidiary of the global wind energy development company Windlab Systems, which has been active in SA since 2007, had a hand in the development of two of the preferred bidders – the Amakhala Emoyeni wind farm in the Eastern Cape and the West Coast One project, near Paternoster.

The company's projects amount to more than 40 percent of the capacity that the preferred bids support.

The potential in this market in the Western and Eastern Cape has led the company to develop a local team and invest in local technology transfer and capacity building, according to Windlab's project portfolio manager, Francis Jackson.

Windlab's regional director for SA, Peter Venn, said: "These projects will deliver real benefits to the people of South Africa: clean electricity, regional employment and local economic development."

The wind projects are expected to create more than 3 600 jobs in operations and construction, crucial to project expansion in developing markets.

"The potential for community uplift and injection of infrastructure and socio-economic development growth, often in impoverished rural areas, is one of the most exciting factors in the



**CLEAN**

**A windmill at the Monte Redondo wind farm north of Santiago**

PICTURE: REUTERS

South African market," Jackson said. "Wind farm developments stand to make a measurable contribution."

Project developers are also encouraged to relocate manufacturing companies to SA to grow local employment around project sites, according to the Department of Energy.

Despite the ultimate economic and environmental benefit to renewable energy, the growth of wind turbines comes with the need to consider start-up costs and challenges that come with this form of energy.

However, according to Windlab and Jackson, "good communication and understanding of the process and outcomes" can engage community support around turbine construction and their eventual benefits.

Turbine location is also sometimes a problem. They are located in open areas and can negatively impact on wildlife, especially birds and bats. As a result, a number of organisations are partnering to ensure that planning for the wind projects considers wildlife habitats.

"We're not against wind energy," said Megan Diamond, the programme manager of the Wildlife and Energy Programme at the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT).

She said energy systems such as electrical wires also endangered wildlife. The fact that the wind energy field was still developing was generally positive, though, because there was a lot of opportunity for better planning.

"We understand that there are impacts, but these can be mitigated provided that wind farms are started in appropriate locations."

The Bird and Wind Energy Specialty Group, a partnership between EWT, BirdLife SA and the SA Wind Energy Association, is an example of stakeholders in the expansion of wind energy working to assess the safety and sustainability of wind farms especially in wildlife-rich areas like the Western Cape.

The group developed initiatives including guidelines to "get everyone on same page and monitoring wind farms in same approach".

Cape Town is hosting the fourth Wind Power Africa conference from Monday to Wednesday at the CTICC.

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