



Contribution ID: 29

Type: **not specified**

INVITED LECTURE: The Role of the Geoscientist in the quest for energy resources in South Africa

Monday, 29 September 2014 11:30 (30 minutes)

Energy in South Africa is a hot topic. Years of underinvestment by the State Utility ESKOM has lulled the country into a false sense of security during the years of cheap electricity only be rudely awakened by the annual price hikes leaving the economy reeling.

While mines, smelters and other industries have the upward pressure to grow, the limited supply of energy has prevented many from doing so. On the contrary, agreements with large electricity consumers have yielded a reduction in electricity consumption by these users implying a reduction in productivity.

The search for alternative energy resources is on. Solar panel farms are being built in the Northern Cape, wind farms are planned in various parts of the country and of course there is shale gas.

Shale gas has been exploited in various parts of the world with good results. The Netherlands have been on a gas bubble for decades and in the USA the amount of gas available today is such that export of shale gas is now a serious consideration.

What are the lessons we must learn from the shale gas revolution? What is the role of the geoscientist in this context? Is there a role beyond the exploration usually done by us? What is the information the legislature needs to make informed decisions and should we/you as geoscientists get involved with this aspect of the energy debate?

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