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Japan Renewable Energy Foundation

A Response to the Government Draft of the Basic Energy Plan of Japan

The Basic Energy Plan of Japan is being revised for the first time since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the accident at the TEPCO Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. In light of the fact that there is still no end in sight to the process of dealing with the accident, the plan should lay out a path toward a safe energy system not dependent on nuclear power. At the same time, as the advance of climate change is becoming ever more evident, the Basic Energy Plan should also clearly indicate the outlook for moving to a sustainable society with greatly reduced dependence on fossil fuels.

The Basic Energy Plan drafted by the government, however, is set on reviving a policy of promoting nuclear power, without being focused on significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is evident in the positioning of both nuclear and coal as “important base-load electricity sources.”

Last December we at the Japan Renewable Energy Foundation made public our “Recommendation for the ‘Basic Energy Plan.’” Now that the government draft plan has been released, we would like to propose the following points anew.

1. Make a major policy decision away from nuclear power and toward energy transition

It is clear that the majority of the Japanese public favor eliminating nuclear power, even if there are differences in the desired timing and speed. What is necessary now is to make a major policy decision clearly stating that no new nuclear plants or reactors will be built and setting a specific timetable for transition to a society no longer dependent on nuclear power.

Since 2011, electric power consumption in Japan has dropped by an amount equal to that produced by ten nuclear reactors. Moreover, newly installed renewable energy sources alone supply the amount of electricity produced by 1.5 nuclear reactors. This kind of energy transition needs to be accelerated, and a major policy decision away from nuclear power is called for.

2. Set high goals for renewable energy introduction and eliminate obstacles to grid interconnection

Regarding renewable energy, the government draft calls for “aiming for self-reliance in the medium to long term.” In several European countries, however, renewable energy—even excluding large-scale hydropower—is already a core power source supplying 20 to 40 percent of electricity needs. Not only in European countries, but even in the U.S., California and some other states supply 20 to 30 percent of power from renewables.

Japan, likewise, should set high goals for introduction, while also taking steps to smooth power grid interconnection and remove other obstacles to introduction, making renewable energy a core power source in Japan as quickly as possible.

3. Stop building new coal-fired plants, and promote low-carbon thermal power generation

The government draft calls for development and introduction of “next-generation high-efficiency coal-fired power generation” to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The CO2 emission factor for this next-generation coal technology, however, is more than twice that of combined cycle power generation using natural gas, a technology that is already in use. Both the U. S. government and the European Commission have set forth policies that restrict new construction of coal-fired plants, including next-generation ones; and many international financial institutions have switched to a policy of no longer funding their construction in developing nations.

Japan should adopt a policy of not building any new coal-fired plants, of expanding renewable energy introduction, and of reducing CO2 emission of thermal power plants by converting to high-efficiency natural gas power generation.

4. Break with regional monopolization and convert to distributed energy systems operated by a variety of entities

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, many companies in various industries have entered the electric power business, while initiatives for promoting community-based renewable energy have spread throughout Japan. A policy should be clearly laid out toward making a transition from large-scale centralized energy systems to local distributed energy systems operated by a variety of entities.

For more information, please contact us:

Japan Renewable Energy Foundation

TEL: 03-6895-1020 / FAX: 03-6895-1021

URL: <http://jref.or.jp/>

E-mail: info@jref.or.jp (Please change ※ into @)
