

Coal plea from Assocarboni chief

Italy's industrial base is at risk because it continues to ignore the contribution of coal to the production of competitive electricity, the chairman of the Italian Coal Association (Assocarboni) has warned.

Andrea Clavarino told delegates at the 2013 IEA / Coal Industry Advisory Board plenary meeting in Paris that the increasing impoverishment of his country's industrial base is directly linked uncompetitive and unsustainable electricity prices.

This year Italy will import 19 Mt of steam coal, a similar volume to 2012, with the 80% coming by sea from the US, South Africa and Indonesia. Europe is forecasted to increase steam coal imports of about 5% compared to 2012, and demand for coal will, according to the IEA, rise by 2.6% per year between now and 2018.

"Italy is the second biggest manufacturing country in Europe, but it also holds the negative record for having the highest electricity bill," said Clavarino. "Italian companies are forced to cope with prices 50% higher than the European average, as the country depends on natural gas and renewables for electricity production for more than 70% of its energy mix. If Italy continues to ignore the contribution of coal to the production of competitive electricity, its envied industrial base will soon be at risk."

Clavarino pointed to three oil-to-coal conversion projects waiting for authorisation in Italy – in Porto Tolle, Vado Ligure and Saline Joniche. "If all implemented, these highly efficient, state-of-the-art projects would increase the coal share in the nation's energy mix to 16% from current 12%," he said.

He argued that Italian coal operators have shown an extraordinary ability to focus on innovation in recent years and fostered significant investments in new clean coal technologies, enabling the environmentally sustainable use of coal.

"Our plants have obtained all the stringent European environmental certifications (EMAS) and boast an average efficiency of 39%, with peaks of 46% in the case of the Torrevaldaliga North and for the prospective oil-to-coal conversion at Porto Tolle, Vado Ligure and SEI power plants, compared to the European average of 35%. This, per se, should lead to a greater exploitation of our coal-fired plants," he concluded.