



Italian steam coal imports forecast flat in 2013 but EU total rising

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Italian coal imports are expected to total 19m tonnes in 2013, flat year on year, Italian coal lobby Assocarboni said on Wednesday.

Coal from the US, South Africa and Indonesia will account for 80% of total imports to Italy, the association added.

Assocarboni said the competitive price of coal will help European power producers compensate for the high cost of gas-fired power generation. The lobby said Europe's total steam coal imports in 2013 will rise 5% year on year. And according to industry association Euracoal, a 5% year-on-year increase would lift European steam coal imports by around 6.4m tonnes to 135.3m tonnes.

In 2012, Italy, Spain and the UK saw the highest increases in coal imports as falling prices increased profit margins for coal-fired generation. According to Euracoal data, Italian imports rose 12% year on year from 16.9m tonnes in 2011; Spain upped its 2012 steam coal imports by 6.4m tonnes or 50% year on year to 19.2m tonnes; while the UK imports rose 13.5m tonnes or 51% year on year to 39.8m tonnes in 2012.

In the first six months of 2013, UK remained the main EU steam coal importer with 21.8m tonnes, up 10% compared to the same period in 2012. Germany came second, where imports in the first six months increased 18% year on year to 18.9m tonnes, followed by Italy where imports were flat year on year at 9.5m tonnes, Euracoal data showed.

Despite the growth of steam coal imports, Assocarboni warned that European climate policies will force manufacturing companies to relocate to areas where cheap electricity is available, such as China, India and the US.

"The European Commission... is regularly underestimating the role and contribution of coal for a competitive electricity," Assocarboni said. "Gas and renewables alone will only make Europe more and more uncompetitive to the US where electricity costs less than half of [that in] Europe." Manca Vitorino