Eskom hopes to dodge load shedding this summer

Eskom is hoping to avoid load shedding this summer, and if it becomes necessary it will not advance beyond Stage 1, promised the power utility's acting Group Chief Executive and Interim Executive chair Jabu Mabuza.

Jabu Mabuza

“There has been an improvement in generation performance since the beginning of this current financial year with an average energy availability factor of 70.4% as of end of August,” he said.

However, he stressed that more still needs to be done to reach the target of 78% and above for average energy availability. “Previously, we had worked out that we could have 26 days of possible stage 1 load shedding,” said Mabuza.

Summer plan

The summer plan is driven on the fact that customer usage generally changes from a typically high demand peak usage in the evenings during winter to a sustained flat demand all day in summer.

The plan also entails Eskom carrying out an average 5,500MWof maintenance at its plants.

The plan is also driven on three unplanned breakdowns scenarios considered of unplanned capability loss factor (UCLF) range of between 9,500MW to 10,500MW.

The utility said the plan balances the need for increased maintenance against the risk of unreliable plant performance.

New trips and plant breakdown like boiler tube leaks as well as high vacuum levels due to high temperatures at the Matimba power station were among the issues highlighted as risks that could lead to load shedding.

Coal stockpiles and generation performance

The utility has been making progress in terms of coal stockpile challenges. Ten of the utility's 15 coal fired power stations have had below the prescribed 20-day coal stock piles.

As of Monday, coal stock piles have picked up to 50 days, excluding the Medupi and Kusile power stations.

"I have been assured that every station will have the required stockpiles by end of financial year," said Mabuza.

The utility reported that there was an uptick in trips. Partial load losses were at 3,575 MW, while unplanned load losses were at 19.54%.

The use of open cycle gas T]turbines (OCTGs) was at R1.4bn versus a budgeted R5.4bn.