

Spain to extend life of its oldest nuclear plant

February 19 2012



Anti-nuclear demonstrators protest in front of the Santa Maria de Garona nuclear plant with a banner reading 'Garona is safe' in 2011. Spain will extend operations at its oldest nuclear power plant by five years, Industry Minister Jose Manuel Soria said as the country seeks to make the most of its energy sources.

Spain will extend operations at its oldest nuclear power plant by five years, Industry Minister Jose Manuel Soria said Saturday as the country seeks to make the most of its energy sources.

The decision was immediately slammed as "irresponsible" by environmentalists.

"The [nuclear safety](#) council has given approval for a five-year extension" of the Garona plant near Burgos, northern Spain, Soria told a meeting of his conservative Popular Party in Seville, southern Spain.

"We cannot allow ourselves to under-utilise any of our energy

resources," the minister added, as Spain faces a likely [economic recession](#) and has undertaken a major austerity programme to clean up its finances.

"We need a good mix, a good combination" of power sources, Soria said.

Garona, first brought on line in 1971, is owned in equal parts by Spanish power companies Iberdrola and [Endesa](#) via their joint venture Nuclenor.

Environmental group Greenpeace has pressed for its closure, portraying it as a "twin sister" of the Fukushima plant in Japan that was hit by an earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, causing reactor meltdowns.

And one of Spain's main environmentalist groups, Ecologistas en accion, said Saturday that "maintaining an old plant that was built before conclusions were drawn from the worst nuclear accidents ... and which suffers from unresolved problems, is irresponsible".

"It is obvious that this body (the nuclear watchdog) represents the interests of Nuclenor, to the detriment of Spanish society".

A decision to shut Garona on April 1, 2013 was overturned as Spain tries to lessen its dependence on fossil fuels.

Spain is home to six [nuclear power stations](#) that include eight reactors, and lawmakers agreed in February to extend the pre-established lifespan of 40 years for the facilities.

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Citation: Spain to extend life of its oldest nuclear plant (2012, February 19) retrieved 20 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-02-spain-life-oldest-nuclear.html>

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