

German parliament backs nuclear exit by 2022

July 8 2011



Anti-nuclear demonstrators outside the Reichstag (parliament) in Berlin on June 30.

The German parliament sealed plans Friday to phase out nuclear energy by 2022, making the country the first major industrial power to take the step in the wake of the disaster at Japan's Fukushima plant.

The nuclear exit scheme cleared its final hurdle in the Bundesrat upper house, which represents the 16 regional states, after the legislation passed the Bundestag lower house with an overwhelming majority last week.

Germany's seven oldest reactors were already switched off after Japan's massive March 11 earthquake and tsunami knocked out [cooling systems](#) at the [Fukushima](#) Daiichi plant, causing reactors to overheat and

radiation to leak.

A further reactor has been shut for years because of technical problems.

The nine reactors currently on line are due to be turned off between 2015 and 2022, an even faster pace than envisaged when Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) announced the decision in May.

Polls indicate a large majority of Germans oppose [nuclear power](#) due to fears of a reactor catastrophe and unresolved issues on the long-term storage of highly radioactive atomic waste.

After Fukushima hundreds of thousands of Germans hit the streets in anti-nuclear protests around the country, and Merkel's then pro-nuclear stance contributed to a string of poor results in state elections this year.

The move marks a dramatic u-turn by Merkel and her centre-right government which last year had approved plans to extend the operation of the country's 17 [reactors](#).

The new premier of the southwestern state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Winfried Kretschmann of the Greens, who was elected in March in part for his long-time opposition to nuclear power, said Merkel's "radical change in policy" allowed the "historic" legislation to pass.

The Bundesrat also approved measures to fill the gap left by nuclear power, on which Germany relies for about 22 percent of its energy needs.

These include building new coal and [gas power plants](#), although Berlin is sticking to its target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by 2020 from 1990 levels, and by 80-95 percent by 2050.

It also signed off on expanding wind energy, in a bid to boost the share of the country's power needs generated by renewable energies to 35 percent by 2020 from 17 percent at present.

But it stopped plans to grant higher subsidies for renovating residential buildings to improve energy efficiency, saying they would cost the cash-strapped states too dearly.

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