

German government defends coal phase-out against critics

January 29 2020



Activists depicting German Chancellor Angela Merkel, right, and German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier are protesting in front of the Federal Chancellery against the coal phase-out law and the resulting delayed coal phase-out in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Jan.29, 2020. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)

The German government approved a bill Wednesday that will codify the country's closure of coal-fired power stations, defending the plan against critics who say it's not ambitious enough.

After signing off on the bill in Cabinet, Economy Minister Peter Altmaier called the plan to phase out the burning of coal by 2038 "a breakthrough" in efforts to combat [climate change](#).

Svenja Schulze, Germany's environment minister, said the next step should be a rapid expansion of renewable energy such solar and [wind power](#).

Ottmar Edenhofer, co-director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, welcomed the Cabinet decision, but said the government had made a mistake by pledging large sums to coal plant operators in return for the shutdowns.

"They undermine the polluter-pays principle, wherein anyone causing emissions should pay accordingly," said Edenhofer, who has in the past advised the government on its energy and climate strategy.

Utility companies can expect to receive about 4.35 billion euros (\$4.8 billion) in the coming years for taking their plants offline.

The managing director of Greenpeace Germany, Martin Kaiser, went further in his criticism, calling the bill a "betrayal" of the careful compromise reached last year by a government-appointed expert panel that he was a member of.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends the weekly cabinet meeting of the German government at the chancellery in Berlin, Wednesday, Jan. 29, 2020. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber)

Kaiser also called on the government to remove administrative and political hurdles to expanding wind and solar power plants, construction of which has slowed significantly over the past year.

The legislation still needs to be approved by parliament.

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Citation: German government defends coal phase-out against critics (2020, January 29) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-01-german-defends-coal-phase-out-critics.html>

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