

GO GREEN

Energy on the green agenda

Candace King

candace.king@tametimes.co.za

BUSINESS & TOURISM
SOJO
 TEL: 011 493 7880
 FAX: 011 493 1702
 e-mail: info@sojo.co.za
 web: www.sojo.co.za

KlipSA
 Klipriversberg Sustainability Association



GREEN BUSINESS ON THE GO: KlipSA and SOJO are serious about tackling sustainability issues. FROM LEFT: Richard Bennett, SOJO Chairman; Chris Yelland, a fellow of the South African Institute of Electrical Engineers; Nicky Vakkaloudis, SOJO CEO; and Andrew Barker, Chairman of KlipSA

About 35 large companies use 40% of Eskom's power. BHP Billiton uses 10% of this figure. Only 5% is supplied directly to residents and commercial businesses.

With blackouts becoming the norm, a viable solution is in desperate need as widespread loadshedding continues to negatively affect residents, consumers and businesses.

With the current crisis on the minds and lips of many, the Klipriversberg Sustainability Association (KlipSA) and South of Joburg Business and Tourism Forum (SOJO) hosted an insightful Green Business Platform breakfast session on Friday 6 February 2015 at the Thaba Eco Hotel, which was attended by businessmen, members of greening and sustainability organizations and companies, as well as concerned residents. "We need to look at the current situation with Eskom and find business solutions," said Andrew Barker, Chairman of KlipSA, at the session.

Titled "The Power Outlook in South Africa and What You Can Do About It", the session featured a presentation by Chris Yelland, a fellow of the South African Institute of Electrical Engineers, a senior member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (USA), and a member of the Institution of Engineering and Technology (UK). Yelland is also a registered chartered engineer with the Engineering Council in the UK.

As he began with his insightful talk, Yelland ironically said that while he was preparing for his presentation, the power went off. Humour aside, Yelland discussed the background to the current problems in South Africa and the power outlook in the

next five years. Issues such as the cost and time overruns at Eskom's Medupi and Kusile power stations were highlighted, as well as the resulting capacity shortages and the impact this has had on maintenance of Eskom's current generation fleet.

The issues of the distribution system maintenance backlog were also covered. Short, medium and long-term solutions were suggested, together with mitigation strategies for industrial, commercial and domestic electricity customers.

"There's a history behind the current power crisis,"

said Yelland. "We can talk for hours about it," he added. Placing things into perspective, he said Eskom was once a proud organization. The public utility was formerly set up through self funding and was self sustaining. Over the years, the power utility lost its way – due to a lack of skills and quality control mechanisms which were not done properly.

What went wrong? "Many of the problems that Eskom's power stations face revolve around boiler tube leaks due to wear and tear. There's a lack of maintenance. The problems at an operational level are because of poor upkeep. Furthermore, there is no spare capacity or power reserves," said Yelland. Yelland notes that Eskom has realized that they have to do this properly. Another huge concern is the bad management and ill condition of electricity boxes in public areas. In several areas, power boxes and sub

stations are in very bad condition and are exposed to the public," noted Yelland.

"There's a lack of maintenance at distribution level. We lose 10 times more hours due to poor distribution," he added.

It is apparent that government is taking control of Eskom now, stepping into the engine room of the failed utility. "Crisis management has now moved to the Union Buildings in Pretoria – it's a war room." This could go either way with positive or negative implications coupled with unexpected outcomes," said Yelland.

Worryingly, there is no formal qualification on the part of government. "Eskom has deep structural issues – Eskom's structure predates 1994 and even 1948. They are operating via an old structure which has never been changed. This is one of Eskom's greatest flaws. They need private sector involvement and need to take on strategic equity, as well as list on the stock exchange. They need time and deep pockets," said Yelland.

Where to from here?

"Business and the private sector can and should have a back up supply via the use of generators," highlighted Yelland.

Other solutions include solar, gas and other alternative forms of energy.

"Solar hot water geysers are something that people should start to think about using. While the return on investment is average and the cost is higher, you end up

saving every month. This is very attractive economically," noted Yelland.

Gas is a very important yet highly neglected topic, said Yelland. "Gas plants are quick to develop and it's more viable than coal. I think gas is very important for South Africa. I believe that gas can become a sustainable business," he added.

Yelland highlighted that renewable energy is one of the biggest programmes in South Africa. These are mostly funded, built and owned by the private sector.

While it is likely that the power crisis will continue till 2016, said Yelland, there is a message of hope. "We have an abundance of alternative forms of energy that can be used. There is long list of things that we can, and should, do that we currently aren't doing," he said.

"There is hope for the private sector and we see this current issue as a business opportunity," concluded Barker.

