

Sunshine, soot and coal dust in Mallorca

Alcudia, Spain

On the holiday island of Mallorca, power utility Endesa has a monopoly on electricity generation. Despite a wealth of renewable energy possibilities with wind and solar, and an underused interconnector to the Spanish mainland, coal still features heavily in Mallorca's energy mix. Its pollution burdens the local population.

Josep Vich knows this reality all too well. He grew up in Alcudia, and believes the sinus and asthma problems he has suffered throughout his life relate to air pollution from the plant and dust from the coal that feeds it.

"We lived in the port of Alcudia, and had a house on the foreshore. All the coal trucks circulated in front of the house. Even when I was a child, I remember people repeatedly complained that when someone sneezed in a tissue, black matter came out. This was the coal dust we were inhaling. It was obviously damaging to health."

Not only does the plant produce air pollution that spreads over a wide area, the coal it burns is imported from countries like Columbia, and shipped to the plant from the port, creating more health risks from coal dust.

Unfortunately, despite the complaints of families like Josep's, Endesa continues to keep the plant running, and it is planning to upgrade rather than close it. The company has support from the national government and grid operator, which may also decide to pump state aid into a retrofit for the plant that will see its lifetime expanded for another five years.

At a time when coal-fired power stations are being retired across Europe, extending the operation of plants by installing new equipment is out of step, and will prolong an unnecessary and preventable health risk for the community.

"I have a six-year old daughter, and all I want for her is that in 20 or 30 years she can have enjoyed her childhood like I enjoyed mine, without having suffered like we have."

