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Is California Meeting Climate Goals By Exporting CO2 Emissions to Its Neighbors?

ARROYO GRANDE, CA., October 12, 2020 - The premature shutdown of San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS) in January 2012 raised a big question for California ratepayers and environmental activists: what would replace the plant's electricity in the state's generation mix? San Onofre, on the Pacific Ocean near San Clemente, had generated over 2 billion watts of clean, carbon-free electricity - 10% of California's in-state generation - for over forty years. An Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) submitted by majority owner Southern California Edison promised the hole in California's electricity supply would be filled by new solar and wind resources, energy storage, and efficiency programs to reduce customer demand.

But records for 2012 tell a different story: a curious jump in electricity from "Unspecified Sources of Power" (USP), a new category introduced in 2009, reveals all of San Onofre's clean generation was likely replaced by gas- or coal-fired electricity imported from other states.

Figure 2: Southern California Edison Power Sources 2009-13

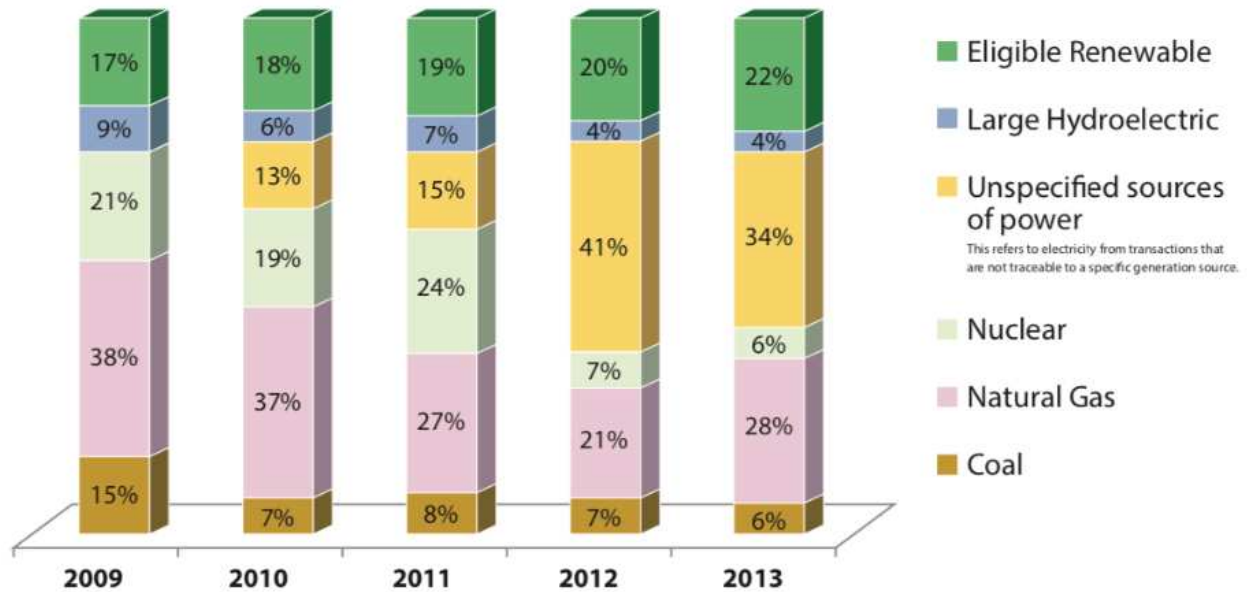
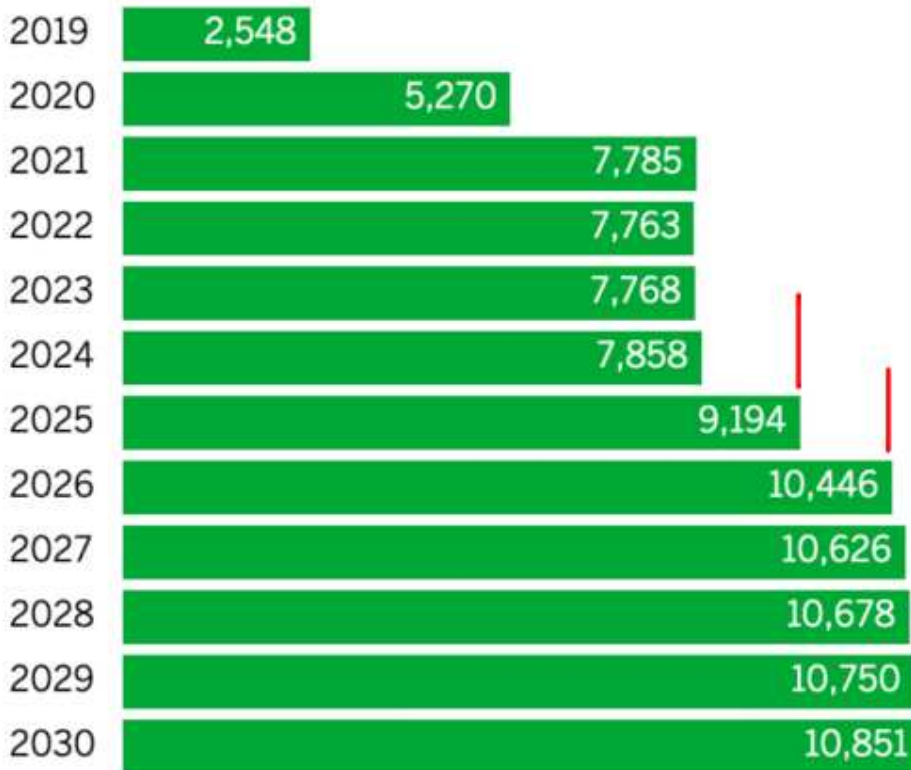


Chart from SCE illustrating the change in reporting with the introduction of the unspecified sources of power in 2010 as required by AB 162.

"That the source of nearly half of Edison's power suddenly became 'unspecified' the year SONGS closed is deeply troubling," said Carl Wurtz, President of Californians for Green Nuclear Power (CGNP). "If SONGS was replaced by coal and/or gas generation from other states, published figures for California's CO2 emissions are at least 43 million tons too low. We've not only missed our 2020 climate goal, we're not even close."

Imports needed for peak load conditions

Estimates in megawatts



Source: California Public Utilities Commission, Gridwell Consulting

California's last remaining nuclear plant, Diablo Canyon, faces a similar fate. On August 25, 2020 an article in the **San Diego Union-Tribune** revealed California's Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) anticipates additional imports will be needed - ones specifically corresponding to the 2024-25 retirement of Diablo Canyon Units 1 & 2. Like those from San Onofre, the imports would significantly increase CO2 emissions.

"Enough is enough," said CGNP Legal Assistant Dr. Gene Nelson. "Science and engineering do not support early retirement of Diablo Canyon, period, and clean air won't be the only casualty. The plant generates the equivalent of five Hoover Dams of reliable, safe, and cost-effective electricity. Dependence on California's aging natural gas transmission system and out-of-state providers means less reliability and higher prices," he said. "The worst of both worlds."