

Solar industry uruguay

As a consequence of high GDP growth and an increase in industrial consumption of power, Uruguay's energy demand is constantly on the rise. The country does not possess native fossil fuel resources and while it has a number of hydropower plants, these do not operate during dry periods, forcing the country to purchase electricity from Argentina at up to US\$400/MWh.

In 2008, the Política Energética Uruguay 2030 was approved by the National Congress. It established a target of 15 per cent of electricity demand to be derived from renewable sources (wind, biomass and micro-hydro projects) by 2015. In 2013, this target was overhauled to an ambitious 90 per cent of total capacity being generated through renewables by the end of 2015. In June 2015, however, comments from Gonzalo Casaravilla, chairman of the state-owned electric utility UTE, indicated that this goalpost had been moved to the end of 2016.

Biomass resources are currently the largest renewable source generating electricity, accounting for 13 per cent of generation in 2014. This source has further potential due to the strength of Uruguay's agricultural, livestock and forestry industry. In this light, an environmental subsidy is being considered by Uruguay for the construction of an urban waste bio-mass plant. A limited feed-in tariff for biomass, introduced in 2010, is currently being revised due to mixed results.

Furthermore, the country has sufficient solar radiation to develop solar PV and STE projects. UTE, who developed the "Plan Solar" framework for developing these technologies alongside the Uruguayan government, has reported that the country's PV generation increased from 362MWh in 2013 to 653MWh a year later.

Additionally, Law 18,585 on Solar Thermal Energy Promotion promotes the development of solar thermal energy through tax incentives and an obligation on hotels, sport clubs and hospitals to obtain 50 per cent of the energy required to heat the water from solar thermal energy. Finally, Decree N° 173/010 authorizes subscribers connected to the low voltage distribution network to install renewable energy generation systems using sources such as wind, solar, biomass or micro hydro.

The Minister for Industry, Energy and Mines, Carolina Cosse, stated in May 2015 that installed capacity in 2016 would reach 1,538MW from hydropower, 1,400MW from solar and 1,500MW from wind. As at July 2015, there are over 20 operational wind projects with a total installed capacity of 600MW. A further 600-700MW is awaited and under construction. The Cámara Solar trade body aims for Uruguay to have one million square metres of solar panelling in place by 2020.

In 2006, Uruguay instituted an auction mechanism to guarantee stable demand and prices, with contracts awarded of up to 20 years, and the ability to trade surplus power in the spot market. Under this mechanism,



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UTE have auctioned several wind and solar projects. The country expects to secure investments of US\$1.74 billion for renewable energy between 2015 and 2019 under PPAs, according to a plan announced by the government in July.

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