

A major Greek court ruling has put the final nail in the coffin for planned power plant Meliti II, and left its sister plant Meliti I operating without legal permission. The decision follows a legal challenge brought by ClientEarth, WWF Greece and Greenpeace Greece.

Greece's Supreme Administrative Court, the Greek Council of State, has annulled the environmental permits for the two lignite-fired power plants, both property of state power company PPC.

The Council of State's decision means that the construction of Meliti II will no longer go ahead, while Meliti I will need to apply for a new environmental permit if it is to continue operating.

The ruling marks a major victory for the health of people and the environment in Greece, which has undergone a major attitude shift on lignite in recent months.

ClientEarth energy lawyer Eleni Diamantopoulou said: "This is a significant win for protecting Greek citizens and the environment from the harmful effects of burning lignite. "Greece's lignite power plants have an abysmal track record of lax permitting. It is crucial that a proper assessment establishing the level of danger posed to people and nature be carried out."

The three environmental organisations challenged the permit, which would have been valid until 2028, after it was renewed in 2018 without assessing the environmental and health impacts of the plant's activity. Failure to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before a permit is granted breaches both national and EU law.

The last EIA was carried out 24 years ago when the Greek Ministry for Environment and Energy issued the first licence in 1998 and did not consider the consequences the plants would have on people's health and the climate in Greece and beyond.

Last month, PPC announced it would cease operating all of its existing lignite-fired power plants by 2023. Meliti I forms part of the fleet to be phased out. So even if it is granted a new permit, Meliti I would only be operational for three years.

PPC's decision came after the Greek government committed to phasing out lignite from its energy mix by 2028 at the latest, setting the path towards a cleaner energy system for the country.

Diamantopoulou added: "These recent developments mean the end of the lignite era in Greece and the beginning of a new, cleaner, affordable and efficient energy system.

"Instead wasting more time and taxpayers' money on power plants destined to be stranded assets, money should be going to clean alternatives, as well as affected workers and communities, to facilitate a just transition that leaves no one behind."

Source: clientearth.org