

Front Page 'Superministry' for Chinese energy

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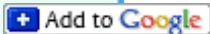
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A new energy bureau is to be created in China to mastermind energy policy and programs.

Hua Jianmin, secretary general of the State Council, announced the restructuring plan at the National People's Congress, the annual meeting for top legislators representing China's 1.4 billion people.

The state news agency, *Xinhua*, reported that the new body - to be known as the National Energy Commission - would draft an energy development strategy complete with its various programs and then monitor and implement its execution. Acting under the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the overall planning body for China, it would promote favoured forms of energy and encourage conservation.

Nuclear energy is already a priority for Chinese planners, even though it only provides a few percent of electricity. Currently China has 11 operating nuclear power reactors, but by 2030 that number could be 130.

The country has extensive reserves of coal, but is seeking to diversify energy supply - particularly in the wake of the recent extremely cold weather, during which coal transport was disrupted, supplies ran out and power cuts crippled the centre of the country. Some areas were without power for up to two weeks during the freeze.

In an indication of how seriously Chinese planners are now taking energy matters, vice-chair of the NDRC Zhang Guobao told Bloomberg News that the new NEC would be headed by the premier or the vice premier of China.

Effectively, the NEC will take over from the former National Energy Leading Group (NELG), which sought to draw together the various elements of policies led by other ministries that related to energy. The NELG would be disbanded, while the new structure would raise the priority of energy strategy. It was acknowledged that the former arrangements could not keep up with the pace of change in the energy sphere.

Four other 'superministries' are to be created in the shake-up: the ministries of industry and information; human resources and social security; environmental protection; housing and urban-rural construction; and transport.