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ANALYSIS | The real state of SA electricity in four charts

news24
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Barring a black swan event, it is unlikely that outages this winter will increase to more than 15 000MW that would necessitate significant load shedding, the author argues.

(hxdyl/Getty Images)

While risks remain, particularly given the still-tight supply-demand balance, SA's power system enters winter 2025 in a more resilient position than in recent years, explains **André Lourens.**

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The energy availability factor (EAF) — how much electricity SA's power plants were able to produce compared to their maximum theoretical capacity — declined slightly to 56.4%1 in April, from 57.5% in March.

But for Eskom's 2025 financial year (April 2024 to March 2025), the EAF averaged 61.2% — an improvement from 54.9% recorded in the previous year, which included some of South Africa's worst load shedding.

Still, while the 61.2% outcome marks progress, it remains well below Eskom's 70% target.

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Historical Eskom EAF.

Source: Eskom and Minerals Council SA

Unplanned breakdowns in the first four months of 2025 have led to intermittent load shedding to maintain system stability. The supply-demand margin remained tight in April. Average electricity demand was 22 310MW, slightly exceeding dispatchable generation of 22 272MW.

On Monday, Eskom released its winter outlook.

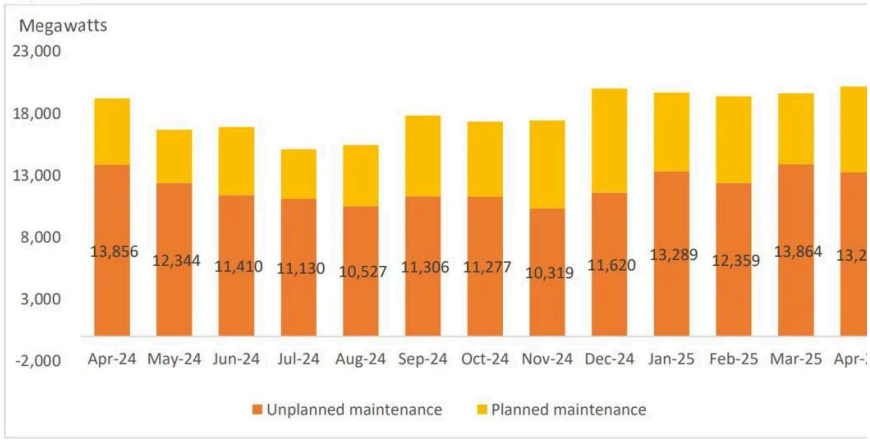
The utility's baseline is for no load shedding during the winter months. Importantly, this is if unplanned outages remain below 13 000MW.

However, if unplanned losses reach 15 000MW, Eskom anticipates up to 21 days of Stage 2 load shedding. Higher stages may be needed briefly — particularly on weekends — to avoid weekday disruptions.

Eskom also warned that in areas with widespread illegal connections, load curtailment may be enforced. This will not be due to generation shortfalls, but to protect infrastructure from overload. The EAF in April ranged from a minimum of 52.5% and a maximum of 60.3%.

Peak demand in April amounted to 29 399MW with peak dispatchable generation at 28 149MW.

The chart below provides context on the past year's planned and unplanned outage levels to help evaluate the credibility of these winter assumptions.



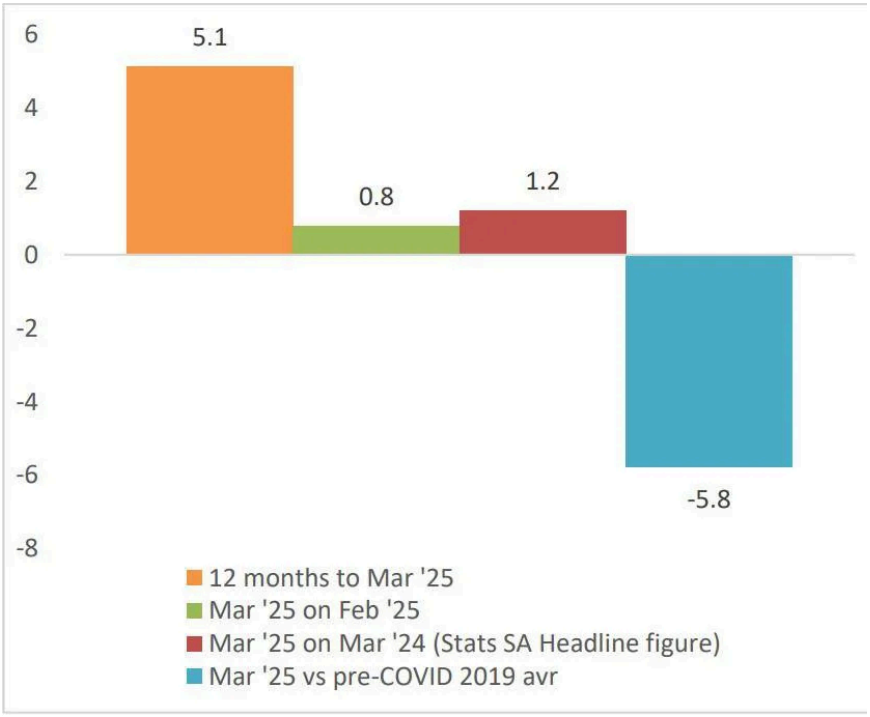
Eskom's unplanned maintenance (outages) and planned maintenance

This track record suggests that Eskom's assumption of unplanned outages remaining between 13 000MW and 15 000MW is not only reasonable but well grounded based on its recent performance.

While the electricity system will likely remain under strain, the trend in breakdowns indicates that, barring a black swan event, it is unlikely that outages will increase to more than 15 000MW that would necessitate significant load shedding.

Data released by StatsSA on 6 May shows that seasonally adjusted real electricity generation rose by 1.2% year-on-year in March 2025. Month-on-month, output increased by 0.8% compared to February.

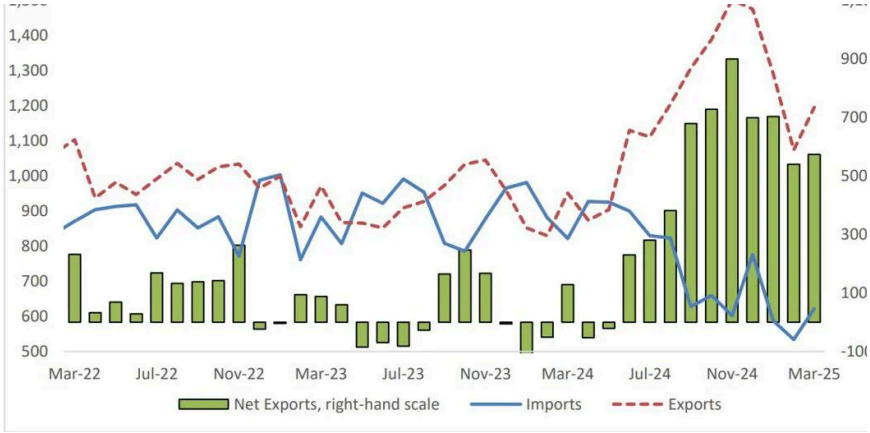
On average, over the 12 months to March 2025, electricity production was up 5.1% relative to the previous year. With March completing the first quarter's data, electricity generation grew by 2.4% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2025. However, due to the decline in the EAF in the first quarter of 2025, electricity production fell by 2% compared to the fourth quarter of 2024 — meaning the sector will likely subtract from GDP growth in the first quarter of the year.



Variation in electricity produced (%, seasonally adjusted), all producers

Source: Stats SA and Minerals Council SA

Eskom estimates that its electricity sales volumes grew by 3.6% in the 2025 financial year, largely due to reduced load shedding and higher export volumes - both of which contributed much-needed revenue for the utility. The chart below shows electricity exports and imports across all producers in South Africa, with exports primarily driven by Eskom.



Imports and exports of electricity

Source: Stats SA and Minerals Council SA

April marked the start of Eskom's 2026 financial year, which began with a 12.74% electricity tariff increase for direct customers. While the utility recorded notable improvements in the Energy Availability Factor and reduced diesel usage during the financial year 2025, these gains followed a period of historically poor performance in the previous year.

Despite the progress, Eskom still fell short of the 70% EAF target set for its coal-fired fleet in its financial year 2025, with the EAF averaging 61.2% for the year.

Nonetheless, the utility has made steady progress through extensive maintenance efforts. Two units at Kusile (1 600MW) were returned to service in January, with the third — Unit 6 — now synchronised and set to add a further 800MW once it enters commercial operation. Additionally, Koeberg Unit 1 (930MW) has been brought back online, and Medupi Unit 4 (720MW) is expected to return during the winter months.

These capacity recoveries support Eskom's positive outlook for the winter period. While risks remain, particularly given the still-tight supply-demand balance, the power system enters winter 2025 in a more resilient position than in recent years.

André Lourens is an economist with the Minerals Council South Africa.

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