
FINAL REPORT OF THE GEOTHERMAL ROUNDTABLE
APRIL 1990
CENTER FOR ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

The Geothermal Round Table was jointly convened and sponsored by the Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) and the Puna Community Council (PCC). Ms. Dee Dee Letts, Assistant Director of the Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) served as facilitator. The intent of the Roundtable was to hold a series of discussions and information exchanges concerning the development of geothermal energy in the Puna District of the Big Island. It was designed to identify information needs and areas of disagreement about geothermal and possible ways to proceed to examine these needs. It was not the intent of the Roundtable nor of the conveners to use it as forum to "mediate" the issue of geothermal development.

PARTICIPATION

Participation in the Roundtable was by invitation of the conveners. Participants included DBED, PCC, geothermal developers, county administrative and legislative bodies, state administrative and legislative bodies, the Pele Defense Fund, and public utility companies. At a later date, a chair at the table was added for an environmental representative since PCC did not feel that they could adequately represent the environmental interests outside of the community area.

GROUND RULES

Ground rules that laid out the parameters for the meetings were developed and agreed to by members of the Roundtable. These included an agreement that the deliberations would not include discussions of the threshold decision of if there would be geothermal development but rather, how, when and under what circumstances such developments might ensue. Other agreements included controls on videotaping, participation by the media and the general public, and that there would be no discussion of issues in litigation.

DISCUSSIONS

The first meeting was held on November 9, 1988 and discussions included a presentation by DBED on the current status of geothermal. Information was exchanged concerning the following:

- rate of geothermal development;
- the costs and the need to clarify conflicting data concerning these costs;
- power purchase agreements;
- transmission ideas and status including joint use of existing telephone poles;
- testing practices concerning the subsea cable;
- the need to address the infrastructure needs of the Puna area as they relate to the proposed geothermal development;
- air quality study needs;

- the need for adequate and independent monitoring; and
- the need for a master plan for geothermal development among other things.

There was discussion of the Habitat Evaluation Procedures that are used in California and copies of these were obtained and supplied to the roundtable members. Raised at this first meeting and continuing through most of the subsequent meetings until its ultimate shut down was the community's strong concern that the State had allowed the experimental HGPA plant to continue to operate with minimal maintenance long past its life expectancy. Throughout the roundtable process the community and county members repeatedly expressed their concern and desire to have the HGPA plant shut down.

A second meeting was held on February 23, 1989 concerning transmission proposals and related concerns. The need for one designated energy corridor was identified to avoid the crisscrossing of Puna with transmission lines. The group identified that any corridor designated should include extensive community involvement in the designation process and might be best owned, run and monitored by the State rather than the utility or developer. Some Roundtable members expressed their desire that if such a corridor were designated that any lines developed prior to this designation be required to relocate into the designated corridor. The effects of Electro-Magnetic Fields (EMF) were discussed and information requested which was subsequently supplied to the members.

Some members additionally voiced their preference that any transmission corridor designated require the burying or berming of the transmission lines through areas that would be in close proximity to residential areas. The Pohoiki transmission proposal was discussed and the need for a second line down highway 130 on the opposite side from the first was questioned. There was support for the one 69 kv line provided that HELCO agree not to run a second and that this line be moved into the permanent corridor should one be identified and that it be bermed or buried in areas where subsequent lines were required to be bermed or buried. These proposed conditions were not acceptable to HELCO.

The proposed timeline for Ormat's 25MW facility and HELCO's transmission of this energy were also discussed. DBED shared with the group that a Request for Proposals (RFP) would be advertised for a consultant to prepare a geothermal master plan for the area. DBED requested the groups input on what should be covered in the RFP. There was also discussion on conservation and what role it could play in Hawaii's energy future and the need for the State to undertake an integrated energy planning process. Compensation issues were also discussed. The group identified socioeconomic aspects of transmission that needed to be covered in the master plan. A discussion concerning various consultants the group thought might apply for the Master Plan RFP took place. Several members expressed reservations about some of these consultants and requested that DBED consider their reservations in the selection process.

A third meeting was held on September 21, 1989. This meeting introduced Frank Kingery, the project manager for ERCE hired to produce the master plan for geothermal. There was extensive discussion on what the master plan should include and a schedule of public meetings was shared with the group. DLNR was asked for a status report on True Mid Pacific and their violations. DLNR also presented the geothermal permitting process and discussed the timing and activities entailed in the process. DOH was present to discuss the status of the air quality regulations for geothermal. Several members expressed concerns that California had just made its regulations much more stringent than their old ones which were the basis of the currently proposed DOH standards that went to public hearing. DOH expressed their intent to adopt these standards and then amend them to meet the more stringent requirements. Members of the group requested that DOH not adopt these standards but go back to public hearing on more stringent standards. DOH agreed to do this. DBED discussed the status of the Hawaii Integrated Energy Assessment process.

A subcommittee of the Roundtable met on April 6, 1989 to discuss issues that needed to be addressed in any EIS produced for geothermal development. The members expressed their concern that new studies and new information were needed and not just a compilations and revisiting of old information and studies. Issues such as transmission corridor impact on property values, health impacts of electromagnetic fields (EMF) etc. need to be thoroughly evaluated and discussed. They also stated a need for an adequate assessment of alternatives to geothermal with an emphasis on energy conservation. The community expressed strong feelings that they should be represented on any accepting committee for the EIS. There were extensive discussions on the need for the EIS to identify decision making points in the process and where and how the community-at-large can get involved. They stressed that Act 301 and its utilization in this process needs to be discussed. The EIS should have a summary of unresolved issues and methods to resolve these or explanations as to why they are being left unresolved. The need for an independent agency to monitor and enforce all aspects of geothermal development was discussed. The PCC made other Roundtable members aware that if the Pohohiki EIS did not embrace their previously identified concerns they would request to be a party in the evidentiary hearing at the PUC. There was also concern expressed about an agency's power to alter a permit administratively without going through a public hearing and the potential impact of this on conditions imposed during public hearings.

A subgroup of the Roundtable was convened on December 6, 1989 at the request of Senator Andy Levin to discuss proposed legislation for the upcoming legislative session. The following bills were the major topic of discussion:

- concerning the need for a geothermal ombudsman/coordinator;
- concerning the need to establish an energy commission for the State; and
- concerning establishment of a geothermal siting authority.

The final meeting of the full roundtable was held on January 9, 1990. Campbell Estate and True/Mid-Pacific made a presentation on their geothermal program. The Roundtable participants asked many questions concerning this program. HECO was asked to supply information concerning their ability to accept 500MW should it be successfully developed. HECO supplied this information which was mailed with the minutes of the meeting. The legislative suggestions of the subcommittee were presented to the Roundtable. Consensus was reached that a proposed bill to subject geothermal development to a referendum vote eligible for Puna residents only was not a good idea. Consensus was not reached on any of the other Bills due to the fact that all the organizations represented had their own internal process of decision-making before any support could be offered. All members indicated that they would seriously look at the subcommittee's recommendations during their own evaluation processes. Concern was expressed by members of the Roundtable that although the process had succeeded in establishing a dialogue and in facilitating a good sharing of information that the dialogue needed to be expanded and that the question of whether or not geothermal development is in the best interest of the Puna district as well as the State needed to be addressed. It was noted that the master plan was under way and that the detailed information needs and community input that had previously been accomplished through the Roundtable could be accomplished through this forum.

Subsequent to this meeting the PCC began discussions with the Governor concerning the development of a "blue ribbon" committee to reassess the need for the State to pursue geothermal energy. During ensuing discussions between the facilitator, DBED and PCC it was decided that the Roundtable had accomplished its mandate and that it should be brought to a close.

RESULTS

Over the duration of these meetings, many issues were clarified and most parties seemed to gain a better understanding of the true areas of disagreement. Roundtable discussions also seemed to contribute to several outcomes.

The first was crystallization and movement towards the concept of a master plan for geothermal energy development within the Puna district. The Roundtable provided a forum to develop this idea and to allow participants to outline what they felt needed to be included in such a master plan. It also gave the participants a chance to have input into the content of the RFP that was developed and later sent out by DBED. Such a master plan was envisioned by the group to address the orderly development of geothermal and the cumulative and ancillary impacts of this development on the community should geothermal proceed. Issues discussed for inclusion were items such as transmission lines, public services impacts and needs, and system reliability.

A second outcome was consensus on the ultimate closing of the HGPA plant. Built as a two-year demonstration project, this plant had

been left to run with minimal attention several years longer than its intended life. Its rusting hulk and antiquated technology were not only an eyesore to the community but provided constant H₂S emissions which served to aggravate the community's belief that all geothermal development is a health hazard and a nuisance.

A final outcome of the Roundtable discussion was that it crystallized and focused the views of both the community and the county regarding air quality regulations proposed by DOH. These proposed regulations had already been heard by the public via the public hearing process. Despite vocal opposition that the regulations were far less stringent than the community and county thought appropriate, the DOH seemed intent on adopting them with the idea of amending them later if more stringent regulations were necessary. During a Roundtable meeting where this was discussed, the DOH Director committed to the group that he would not adopt the current proposed standards but would go to hearing on the more stringent standards that California had recently adopted.

Ultimately, the Roundtable appears to have served as a useful forum for these issues. The public interest and County parties in the Roundtable are now dialoguing with the State Administration to develop a vehicle whereby they can reassess the need for geothermal in the overall view of an integrated energy plan for the State of Hawaii.

Information was shared and a venue for discussion on geothermal issues was established. The Roundtable exceeded its original goals through reaching several more concrete outcomes. It not only established a dialogue that did not previously exist but this dialogue is continuing informally among the parties. Should all parties desire to reconvene the Roundtable in the future the Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution stands ready to assist.