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New Push for a Renewable Energy Transformation: Seven Climate, Energy and Environment Bills Pass National Assembly

- Priority grid access for public-interest renewable energy projects, including Solar Income Villages
- Reform of the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) and establishment of a framework for timely power grid construction

The Ministry of Climate, Energy and Environment (MCEE, Minister Kim Sungwhan) announced that amendments to seven laws, including the Electric Utility Act and the Act on the Promotion of the Development, Use and Diffusion of Renewable Energy, passed the National Assembly plenary session on August 20.

With the large-scale transformation to renewable energy now an urgent national priority for developing advanced industries such as artificial intelligence (AI), responding to the climate crisis, and achieving energy security, the passage of these amendments establishes the foundation needed to implement and support this transition. The key provisions of each amendment are as follows.

Priority Grid Access for Public-Interest Renewable Energy Projects, Including Solar Income Villages

❶ Amendment to the Electric Utility Act

❷ Amendment to the Special Act on Activation of Distributed Energy

While there is a need to expand community-participatory renewable energy projects for public-interest purposes, such as revitalizing local communities and promoting renewable energy, shortages in the power grid in some regions are making it difficult to implement these projects.

Accordingly, an exception has been established to allow priority access to the power grid for small-scale (1 MW or less), public-interest, community-participatory renewable energy projects implemented in areas surrounding national-scale power grids and other designated areas. This provides the legal foundation for the prompt implementation of public-interest renewable energy projects, such as Solar Income Villages.

* (Current) Transmission and distribution operators must allow electricity business operators to use electric facilities without discrimination.
(Amended) Public-interest renewable energy projects may be connected to electric facilities on a priority basis over other electricity businesses.

Reform of the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) System

❸ Amendment to the Act on the Promotion of the Development, Use and Diffusion of Renewable Energy

After 15 years, the government is reforming its renewable energy deployment system. Introduced in 2012, the current RPS requires power generators above a certain capacity to source a specified share of their electricity generation from renewable energy.* While the system has contributed to expanding renewable energy deployment, it has had limitations in driving down renewable energy generation costs and fostering domestic industry.

* The supply obligation can be fulfilled either by directly generating renewable energy or by purchasing renewable energy generation records from external sources.

To fundamentally overcome these limitations, the system will be completely transformed into a government competitive-bidding “contract market system,” which is operated by the majority of major countries.

First, under the new system, Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs)*, which is the mechanism underpinning the current system, will no longer be issued for new facilities from next year. Going forward, new renewable energy facilities will have to compete** in the contract market by type of power source and win bids. For successful bidders, Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) will enter into long-term fixed-price power purchase agreements, ensuring stable revenues, reducing the financing costs of renewable energy projects, and improving their bankability.

* RECs enable the trading of renewable energy generation records from external sources.

** Competition is conducted based on facility capacity, within the announced capacity and price ceiling.

In addition, the revised system strengthens the public-interest dimension of renewable energy projects by requiring public power generation companies and others to install renewable energy facilities of a specified capacity. It also includes measures to facilitate a stable transition to the new system while protecting the legal interests of existing operators, such as transitional provisions* and the operation of a separate market for small-scale facilities.

* Existing operators will continue to receive REC issuance, while the REC spot market will be phased out after a three-year grace period following the enforcement of the Act (December 31, 2029).

Amendments to Three Power Grid Acts to Ensure Timely Grid Construction

❹ Amendment to the Electric Utility Act
❺ Amendment to the Electric Power Source Development Promotion Act

With the recent increase in renewable energy generation facilities, including offshore wind power, connecting each renewable energy facility individually to the power grid has resulted in excessive grid connection costs and raised concerns about unplanned land development, highlighting the need for improvement.

Accordingly, a legal basis has been established for the construction of shared grid connection facilities for renewable energy and for designating operators thereof, enabling multiple renewable energy generation facilities to connect jointly to the power grid.

❻ Amendment to the Special Act on the Expansion of National Key Power Grids

Under current law, only KEPCO, the transmission system operator, is permitted to construct national key power grids. However, with the volume of power grid construction projects surging in recent years, KEPCO's existing workforce alone is insufficient to ensure timely construction.

To address this, private-sector operators other than KEPCO will also be allowed to participate in national key power grid development projects, subject to approval by the Power Grid Expansion Committee.

※ To ensure stable operation of the system, once development is completed, the facilities must be immediately transferred to KEPCO. The amended provisions allowing private-sector operators to participate in development projects will remain in effect until December 2029.

Support for Coal-Fired Power Plant Workers and Regions Affected by Plant Closures

❼ Proposed Special Act on Support for Coal-Fired Power Plant Workers and Regions Affected by Plant Closures

As aging coal-fired power plants are scheduled to be phased out, there is an urgent need for systematic support to address employment insecurity and economic downturns in affected regions.

Accordingly, following discussions with stakeholders, including affected regions and labor groups, a comprehensive support framework has been established through the enactment of a special act covering procedures for establishing and approving coal-fired power plant phase-out plans, employment security and reemployment support for workers, and the development of alternative industries.

Rationalizing Regulations on the Import and Export of Waste Resources to Enhance Resource Security

❽ Amendment to the Act on the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal

Under the current system, waste imports are permitted for one year following the required import authorization or notification. In line with international standards, the validity period for waste imports has been extended to up to three years.

※ [Extension Requirements] (Import Authorization) When importing waste from an OECD member country for recycling at an “excellent recycling facility”; (Import Notification) When importing waste designated by the Minister of Climate, Energy and Environment.

Furthermore, as waste resources from which critical minerals such as rare earth elements are extracted are becoming key strategic resources worldwide, a legal basis has been established to restrict waste exports when necessary to stabilize the domestic supply and demand of waste resources, thereby strengthening the legal foundation for resource security.

The MCEE will make every effort to prepare the necessary conditions, including revising subordinate statutes, to ensure that the seven bills passed by the National Assembly on August 20 are implemented smoothly in the field.