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# Promises of 'fair' energy

**D**eputy Prime Minister and Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) leader Gen Prawit Wongsuwon has caused a big splash in politics with his two "open letters", adding some colour to predictable Thai politics.

Keeping the momentum going, the PPRP this week promoted its electoral promises, which included "restructuring" the energy industry via policies to make it "fair."

But the PPRP has not explained how "fair" the policy is. Nor did the party say, if elected into public office, how it would restructure the opaque and centralised energy sector and its decision-making processes.

Yet the party's attempt is a positive note, as well as an interesting one, because parties rarely touch on the issue of how energy policies are made and structured.

Most of the election promises on energy policies are based on populism, such as the promise of lower electricity bills for low-income earners.

Contemporary energy ideas are also largely focused on climate change-related issues such as carbon credits and EV plug-in stations, while questions about what type of structure would make energy policies fair for all in society go unanswered.

The current decision-making process is via a centralised approach.

Energy policies are proposed by the Energy Ministry and decided by National Energy Policy Council (NEPC) — a committee chaired by the prime minister and related ministers.

Energy policies such as commercial concessions or even decisions on electricity fees are regulated, decided and monitored by the Energy Regulatory Committee (ERC) and the Energy Ministry. But who gets to be a member of the ERC is decided by the NEPC, creating the issue that there is no independent regulatory body monitoring the nation's energy sector. At present, everything is under the umbrella of the ministry.

In comparison, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC), despite some of its controversial decisions, is more independent, and its recruitment process is more decentralised from the bureaucracy. NBTC members come from applications and are handpicked by the Upper House.

Over the past two years, many have been critical of the government's energy policies, especially those resulting in the government purchasing far too much electricity from Laos and then passing on the cost as per fuel tariffs in electricity bills or other pricing structures.

These concerns are not novel. For over two decades, local conservationists and consumer groups and some critical politicians have asked questions concerning how the kingdom's energy sector operates but without much success.

That's unsurprising, given how the decision-making process is conducted in a centralised and closed system. How could people understand the energy policy and engage in a meaningful manner when the needed information is controlled by energy technocrats in the government?

Political parties now promising to make the energy structure fair must look at the decision-making process. This could start with changing the recruitment process of the ERC by adopting a more open process through parliament.

To make it fairer, consumer groups and the public must have more of a say and more access to information. Without a more open decision-making process and public participation, the energy structure and policy will never be fair.