

Cabora Bassa: no sweat for Escom

How well could Escom cope if political developments in Mozambique robbed it of power from Cabora Bassa? Reasonably well, it maintains, though it would prefer not to have to.

Its basic policy is to keep about 17% of total capacity in reserve. The 625 MW it should be taking from Cabora Bassa from the middle of next year for SA consumption represents only 5,8% of the 10 700 MW of capacity that will be installed by the end of this year.

Demand, however, has been growing rapidly in recent years. Against an annual average growth during 1969-73 of 10%, unit sales rose last year by 11,8%. They've been rising at an even faster rate this year, adds Escom.

By the late Seventies, it reckons, winter peak demand will be rising annually by the equivalent of 800 MW. Its facilities to cope with this explosion in demand are, of course, being constantly expanded.

Another 1 050 MW will be provided next year, for example — 200 MW at Hendrina, 350 MW at Arnot and the first 500 MW set at Kriel. Virtually the same degree of expansion will be achieved in 1976.

But Escom has had serious teething troubles with recently installed sets which have prevented them from quickly achieving rated capacity. If further sets suffer similar problems, not to have power from Cabora Bassa could embarrass Escom.

That, however, would be the worst it could suffer. It doesn't have any capital tied up in Cabora Bassa, for instance.

Twin cables, 1 400km long, will bring direct current from Cabora Bassa to Escom's Apollo substation at Irene, near Pretoria, for conversion there to alternating current (interestingly, Escom is already sending power from the Eastern Transvaal to Mozambique, which last year bought 151m units of electri-

city requiring a capacity for peak demand periods of 25-30 MW. Escom will take 55 MW from Cabora specifically for feeding Lourenco Marques). But even the R55m cost of the SA section of the lines and ancillary services is being met by the Treasury.

In short, if a future Mozambique government decides not to sell electricity to SA, it would be disastrous for Cabora Bassa. The plan has always been for Escom to buy most of the scheme's output, at least in the early years. Of its first year output of 800 MW, for example, Escom will take 680 MW, yielding a first year surplus of R5,6m which should rise to R8,7m a year by the late Seventies.

SA, though, could survive without Cabora Bassa. But doing so would mean that Escom would have to keep its expansion plans flexible.

Major decisions could, therefore, be needed during the next year.