

[Bakersfield Californian Guest Commentary, Wednesday, Nov. 6, 2013:](#)

HECA will mean jobs, power and product for Kern County

By Les Clark

Hydrogen Energy California's alternative energy generation project near Buttonwillow is important for Kern County's future. When completed, HECA, as it's known, will provide electricity for approximately 160,000 homes, increase local oil production, produce a local supply of fertilizer products, provide many local environmental benefits and create jobs. The project is clearly a win-win for Kern County.

Now it's time to move forward. Government agencies have conducted countless hearings and workshops on the project. Volumes of materials and information have been reviewed by multiple agencies, and wide-ranging questions have been asked and answered. HECA has done what it needs to do and then some to make this important project happen.

In addition to the benefits to Kern County, HECA will enable the county to maintain its longstanding national leadership role in energy resource development. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in its recently proposed national performance standards for electric utility generation, specifically highlighted HECA's carbon capture and storage process as an example of clean technologies to cut new power plant pollution. The project already has the support of the U.S. Department of Energy, in recognition of the project's importance as a safe and cost-effective way to produce clean energy.

Using clean hydrogen gas produced by the plant's coal gasification process, HECA will generate 300 megawatts of electricity for the energy grid, then capture at least 90 percent of the plant's carbon dioxide. This CO₂ will then be injected and safely stored deep under nearby oil fields and put to good use to extract approximately 5 million barrels of oil a year through a process known as enhanced oil recovery. In addition, the HECA complex will support our agriculture industry by producing over 1 million tons per year of much needed fertilizer products using one of the cleanest commercial-scale fertilizer production facilities in the world.

The HECA project will include state-of-the-art emission control technology and multiple environmental and safety measures -- some above and beyond what would normally be required. HECA will use a water source that will actually improve the local groundwater quality, preserving our limited fresh water resources by using brackish water for process needs, and recycling that water for re-use in the complex. It is also finding a beneficial re-use for the solids that will remain after the gasification process.

Earlier this year, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District found that HECA complies with all district offsetting regulations, and will ultimately be a net benefit to the region's air quality. Those offsets will not only mitigate emissions, they will allow Kern County to invest in the air pollution reduction measures we need here and now to improve the county's air quality. Some of these include myriad road improvements, as well as funding tangible emission reduction programs such as clean running school buses, traffic light synchronization, energy efficient agricultural pumps and other infrastructure improvements.

Equally important, the HECA project will have direct and positive impacts on our lives by creating jobs and economic growth right here. It is expected to generate approximately \$3.4 billion in economic stimulus to Kern County during construction and \$291 million in annual local economic impact over its lifetime. More than 2,000 high quality construction jobs and more than 200 permanent operations jobs will be created during a period when our economy is still struggling. This is welcome news at a time when the Employment Development Department indicates that while Kern County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate has come down slightly, it is still at 10.9 percent, a full two points higher than the rest of the state.

Now, let's get it right. If we are to create the jobs we need, rebuild our economy, and create a cleaner energy environment for future generations, the Hydrogen Energy California project should be approved.

Les Clark of Bakersfield served as vice president of Independent Oil Producers' Agency from 1980 to 1999. IOPA is comprised of independent oil companies operating mainly in the San Joaquin Valley.