

## Interview Voltalia CEO: Hybrid Cluster Up To Speed

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**Robert Klein** details what's going on at the Serra Branca wind and solar complex in Rio Grande do Norte.

On the eve of the implementation of the regulation for the establishment of hybrid and associated plants in the country, promised for this year and whose contributions from the public hearings on its standardization (61/2020) are being evaluated by Aneel, **Voltalia** has moved the project in its Serra Branca wind-solar cluster, in Serra do Mel in Rio Grande do Norte, up to top speed. Expected to reach 2.4 GW, the cluster already has 800 MW in operation and under construction in wind power and will start construction of the 500 MWp solar park this semester, as **Robert Klein**, the president of **Voltalia**, revealed in an interview with Brasil Energy.

**Brasil Energy:** How is the Serra Branca wind and solar hybrid cluster project in Rio Grande do Norte going?

**Klein:** We already have more than 800 MW in operation and under construction in the cluster in wind farms, and the total potential of the cluster should reach 2.4 GW. We are currently in the construction phase of Ventos Serra do Mel 2, 3 and 4 and this semester we will start the construction of the solar plant in the cluster, Solar Serra do Mel, with 500 MWp, which will be the largest solar generator of the entire company in the world. Today we have more than 170 wind turbines in commercial operation, including the wind complex of Ventos de Serra do Mel 1 (VSM 1), completed last year, and part of VSM 2, which should be fully completed in the coming months. When we finish the VSM 3 and 4 wind farms, we will add another 79 wind turbines to the cluster.

**Brasil Energy:** How much has already been invested?

**Klein:** For strategic reasons, we do not discuss contract values, but I can say that up to today the company, together with its partners, has invested more than R\$ 2 billion (US\$ 397 M) in Rio Grande do Norte.

With the construction of the 291 MW of the VSM 1 and 2 projects alone, we are investing an additional R\$ 1 billion (US\$ 185 M). The forecast is that Voltalia will invest another R\$ 2.5 billion (US\$ 463 M) in the state by 2023, in addition to what has already been invested so far.

**Brasil Energy:** Why did you choose the Serra do Mel region for the hybrid experience?

**Klein:** We identified the region's potential in 2007 and started to develop it in 2008. The Serra Branca cluster covers an area of approximately 40,000 hectares in an area of 50 km by 15 km and is a region known for its exceptional wind and solar resources.

**Brasil Energy:** Is the idea to benefit from the regulation of hybrid and associated plants that Aneel promises for this year?

**Klein:** We are waiting for Aneel to analyze the comments sent for the publication of the regulation of the topic. The great benefit of hybrid plants is the optimization of the use of the transmission network. Our cluster will have both sources and the idea is to take advantage of their synergies, such as sharing the same structure for the flow of energy, which contributes to more competitive ventures.

In 2019, we completed the construction of the 500 kV transmission line to connect the cluster to the national grid. TL added even more competitiveness to the existing and future projects of the Serra Branca cluster, through economies of scale.

**Brasil Energy:** Does Voltalia have other experiences with hybrid plants?

**Klein:** Right here in Brazil we have a hybrid project in the isolated system of Oiapoque, in Amapá, with 4 MW solar plus 12 MW of thermal. The city is not connected to the SIN and we are responsible for supplying its energy needs. Our photovoltaic plant was installed in 2017 and has significantly reduced the use of diesel fuel by the thermal plant. There are 15,840 solar panels, occupying an area of 70,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

**Brasil Energy:** Will the Serra Branca cluster be focused on the free market?

**Klein:** Yes, it will. In 2014 we signed several short, medium and long-term contracts for the sale of energy in the ACL. A milestone was the 10-year PPA closed in 2018 with BRF, one of the largest food processing companies in the world. It was our first long-term energy sale agreement with a client in the corporate market on the free market.

More recently, we signed a 20-year contract with Braskem for the sale of solar energy that will supply all the petrochemical units in the country. These are important contracts that reinforce our commitment and intention to sell energy through long-term corporate PPAs. We know that companies are increasingly showing interest in buying clean energy directly, and this is due to both sustainability and economic reasons.

Many renewable energy projects are thus being made possible thanks to corporate PPAs, which is excellent news. I would emphasize, however, that the regularity with which we win the auctions in Brazil underscores our ability to develop renewable energy projects and that our strategy of combining a regulated and free market has been successful over the years.