



BPPA Weekly Monitoring Bulletin for the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority

13 June 2005

News from Parliament

House of Commons Written Answers, 9 June 2005.

Sellafield

Shadow Minister for Trade and Industry, Hon Bernard Jenkin (North Essex) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the safety implications of the recent leak at the Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant at Sellafield; and when the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is expected to make its report on the leak.

Minister for Energy, Malcolm Wicks: British Nuclear Group informed the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Nuclear Installations Inspectorate on 20 April of a leak of dissolved spent fuel, resulting from a failure in the pipe-work within the Feed Clarification Cell in the Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP). Material leaked within THORP into a fully enclosed stainless steel clad cell designed to safely contain such leakages. The plant is in a safe and stable state. There has been no release of radioactivity from THORP and there is no risk to employees, the local community or the environment.

Safety is the key priority and British Nuclear Group Sellafield Ltd. is working to recover the liquid in a safe and controlled manner. HSE has been kept informed throughout.

BNGSL issued a press statement outlining the findings of the internal inquiry which may be found at www.britishnucleargroup.com/index.aspx?page=30.

HSE is carrying out its own independent investigation, the findings of which it will make public. Because of the wide range and complexity of the investigation it is not yet known when the findings will be reported.

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House of Commons Written Answers, 7 June 2005.

Nuclear Industry

Lib Dem Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Norman Baker (Lewes): To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much and what percentage of public expenditure on energy research and development was spent on research and development for (a) nuclear fission, (b) nuclear fusion, (c) fossil fuel generation and (d) renewable energy sources in each year since 1997.

Minister for Energy, Malcolm Wicks, (Croydon North) (Lab) [holding answer 23 May 2005]: The table sets out the expenditure of the DTI and research councils on research and development for nuclear fission, fusion, fossil fuel generation and renewables between 1997-78 and 2004-05.

	£million							
	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05 ⁽³⁾
Nuclear fission	1.04	1.68	2.56	0.13	2.32	2.41	2.31	2.32
Nuclear fusion	16.6	12.6	14.3	17.0	14.4	14.6	15.63	19.53
Fossil fuel generation	3.43	3.0	2.61	4.85	5.52	4.35	6.25	8.13
Renewable energy ⁽⁴⁾	13.7	15.0	14.39	15.46	18.82	24.40	29.07	25.16
Other ⁽⁵⁾	1.73	1.87	2.00	2.07	2.27	2.65	1.97	4.86

⁽³⁾ Estimated spend with some elements not included

⁽⁴⁾ Includes full range of renewables and also Research Council spend on carbon capture, energy storage and networks

⁽⁵⁾ Includes energy efficiency

In addition further research relating to energy is included in the work of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research which has some £310 million funding from research councils over 2000-2005, and in the work of the Carbon Trust. The UK also participates in international collaborative energy research via the EU and the International Energy Agency.

Dr Lynne Jones, (Birmingham Selly Oak) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many potential threats as defined by the Nuclear Industries Security Regulations 2003 have occurred at each licensed nuclear installation since 1 January 2004.

Minister for Energy, Malcolm Wicks, (Croydon North) (Lab): The Nuclear Industries Security Regulations 2003 do not define potential threats. Section 10 of the regulations requires the reporting of security incidents: details of those incidents reported to the Office for Civil Nuclear Security for the year 2004 are at:

<http://www.dti.gov.uk/about/foi/documents/ocns.pdf>

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House of Commons Written Answers, 6 June 2005.

Power Stations

Opposition Spokesman on DEFRA, Bill Wiggin, (Leominster, Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list (a) the power stations operating in the UK and (b) the power stations that have been decommissioned since 2001.

Minister for Energy, Malcolm Wicks, (Croydon North): A list of UK power stations can be found on the DTI website. A list of generation disconnections can be found at table 3.7 of National Grid Transco's Seven Year Statement at <http://www.nationalgrid.com>.

House of Commons Written Answers, 9 June 2005.

Nuclear Industry

Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether consent from the Scottish Executive is required for nuclear generation stations to be built or extended in Scotland.

Minister for Energy, Malcolm Wicks: Yes.

House of Commons, Answers to Oral Questions, 7 June 2005.

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Nuclear Power

SNP Spokesman for Energy and Trade and Industry, Mike Weir (Angus): What responsibilities are devolved, and which reserved, in relation to any decision to commission and locate a new nuclear power station in Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland, Rt. Hon Alistair Darling, (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): New power stations in Scotland require consent, under the Electricity Act 1989, from Scottish Executive Ministers. Nuclear energy and installations, including nuclear safety, security and safeguards, are reserved, subject to exceptions set out in the Scotland Act 1998.

Mike Weir: I thank the Minister for that reply, but it does not make it entirely clear what the planning position is as regards nuclear power stations. The Minister will know that there is huge opposition to new nuclear power stations in Scotland and to nuclear dumps in Scotland. Will he give a cast-iron guarantee that the United Kingdom Government will not seek to impose a new nuclear power station on Scotland without the express consent of the Scottish Parliament using its planning powers?

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Alistair Darling: The position is absolutely clear, and if the hon. Gentleman had given the matter even the slightest investigation, he would see that. At the end of the day, because the Scottish Executive would have to give planning permission, it is for them to decide whether a large nuclear power station should be built. The matter rests with them. It will be up to the Scottish Executive, and the Ministers in that are, of course, answerable to the Scottish Parliament.

Anne Picking (East Lothian) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the one thing that is fundamental to the people of Scotland is security of supply, and if they were asked a question about the future of nuclear power and whether there should be a station, they would say yes if that would ensure security of supply?

Alistair Darling: My hon. Friend is right. It is important that we maintain the security of supply of electricity in Scotland, as in the whole United Kingdom. Nuclear power has played an important part in generating electricity in Scotland in Torness in my hon. Friend's constituency. Of course, when we discuss future generation requirements, we need to consider all aspects of electricity generation. One of the problems with the nationalists is that they know very well what they are against but are not very clear what they are for.

Shadow Scottish Secretary and Shadow Minister for Women, Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest) (Con): The Secretary of State has not made his answer clear. This is not just about planning permission; it is about energy policy. He must be well aware that his Government are quite likely to propose the building of new nuclear power stations generally, while many Members of the Scottish Executive have publicly declared their opposition to nuclear power. Surely the Secretary of State must realise that this is not just a matter of planning permission but of serious constitutional difficulty. How does he propose to resolve it?

Alistair Darling: First, I welcome the hon. Lady's appointment as shadow Secretary of State for Scotland. I am sorry that the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) did not last more than a few days before he was discarded by the leader of the Conservative party; in fact, he must be the only person nominated as shadow Secretary of State never even to make it to the first Question Time, let alone do anything else.

In relation to the hon. Lady's question, the position is very clearly set out in the Electricity Act 1989 and the Scotland Act 1998. As I said in my earlier answer, new nuclear power stations in Scotland require consent from the Scottish Executive under the Electricity Act 1989; nothing could be clearer than that.

Eric Joyce (Falkirk) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that what we really need in this country is an intelligent, mature national debate on how we deliver on our future energy requirement in the light of global warming? Does he, like me, long for the day when the Scottish nationalists, in particular, can deliver on showing a bit of maturity?

Alistair Darling: Most of us have long given up on my hon. Friend's last point. On his substantive point, yes, there is a big debate to be had, not only in Scotland but in the whole United Kingdom, about electricity supply. We all know that the difficulty with nuclear power stations is the disposal of waste, which is a big question that needs to be answered. Equally, however, we are aware that although many people are signed up to the proposition of more and more renewable energy, the fact is that whenever sites are proposed there are substantial objections, sometimes for understandable reasons, and those need to be resolved as well.

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The position of all the Opposition parties at the moment, one way or the other, seems to be that something needs to be done, whether or not they are against any possible solution. As a country, we need to face up to the fact that we will need to replace our energy generation over the next few years, we need to have a sensible debate about the pros and cons of each type of electricity generation, and then we need to make decisions. The difference between us and them, I suppose, is that we are in a position in which we have to make decisions, whereas they are unlikely to be in that position for some considerable time.

News from Nirex

Nirex publishes historic site list.

On 10 June 2005 Nirex published an historic short-list of sites, compiled during the 1980s as possible locations for a radioactive waste repository.

The programme of which this was part was eventually abandoned in 1997, but the list of sites has not been previously published. There is currently no such site selection exercise being undertaken in the UK. If and when a new site selection exercise is needed in the future this old list will not form the starting point of such a process.

At the same time Nirex has also published details of the site selection process that led to the old short-list, including the names of those sites that were considered at earlier stages of the process and subsequently ruled-out. The list is being made public following agreement between Nirex, Government and the Devolved Administrations following changes to freedom of information provisions that came into effect earlier this year.

Commenting on the release of the list, Nirex Managing Director Chris Murray said: "Radioactive waste exists and needs to be dealt with whether or not there is any programme of new build in the UK. Dealing with the waste is as much an ethical and social issue as a scientific and technical one. This is the key lesson we have learned from the past. Openness and transparency must underpin everything that is done in this area.

We hope that the publication of the list, following consultation with our stakeholders, will help to move the debate away from past attempts to tackle this issue and on to the new process, led by the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM), in which we would encourage everyone to get involved. Many things have changed since this old list was drawn up, but what has not changed is that the waste still exists and needs to be dealt with in a safe, environmentally sound and publicly acceptable way for the long-term. Responsibility lies with this generation to ensure this is done".

The most recent attempt to implement a deep geological repository to manage intermediate and low-level wastes ended with a refusal in 1997 from the Secretary of State for the Environment to allow the construction of an underground Rock Characterisation Facility (RCF) at a site chosen close to the Sellafield works. This led to the initiation of the Government's "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" programme, and the decision to set up the independent CoRWM to provide a recommendation on the best option or combination of options for managing the UK's higher activity radioactive waste in the long term.

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CoRWM is due to report in July 2006. Site selection is not part of its remit. Government will not begin to consider a new site selection process again until 2007/8, when it has received and had time to assess CoRWM's recommendations on the best option, or options, to take forward.

The historic list of short-listed sites, (not in ranked order) is:

Bradwell, Essex
Potton Island, Essex
Dounreay, Caithness, Scotland
Altnabreac, Caithness, Scotland
Fuday, Western Isles, Scotland
Sandray, Western Isles, Scotland
Killingholme, South Humberside
Offshore - East (serviced by Redcar Port)
Offshore - West (serviced by Hunterston Port)
Sellafield, Cumbria (two locations)
Stanford, Norfolk

News from the Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum

Nirex Nuclear Site List Publication

On 10 June, the Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum welcomed the release of the historic list of sites previously considered by Nirex for radioactive waste disposal over 15 years ago.

NuLeAF understands why the government was in the past concerned about public and community reaction. However, we are pleased that the Freedom of Information Act, and the government and Nirex's commitment to open and transparent processes of community and stakeholder engagement on radioactive waste issues, now means that secrecy can no longer be maintained.

Councillor Geoff Blackwell, Copeland Borough Council and Chair of NuLeAF commented:

We do appreciate that the release of this list now might raise real concerns in the local communities being named, and this is why we have worked with Nirex to ensure that the release of the list was properly explained and that every local community was provided with explanatory information.

NuLeAF understands Nirex's view that the list is mainly historic in nature but recognises some locations could be considered again in a new siting process depending on how the UK nuclear waste legacy is managed in future.

No siting process currently exists because the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) is now consulting on which option, or combination of options, to recommend to Government for future waste management. NuLeAF supports the CoRWM process - based on the 1993 "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" White Paper. Information about this process is available on the CoRWM website <http://www.corwm.org.uk>.

NuLeAF are advising all communities with named sites on the list to engage in the CoRWM policy development process.

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News from Friends of the Earth

Secret N-Waste Dump Sites Revealed.

On 10 June 537 locations throughout Britain, once identified as potential sites for disposing of the UK's radioactive waste were published. After 15 years of secrecy, the highly sensitive list has been made public for the very first time by the nuclear waste agency, Nirex. The list was forced into the public domain as a result of the Freedom of Information Act.

Friends of the Earth welcomed the list's publication but hit out over the years of secrecy surrounding the locations and called on the Government to finally rule out any new radioactive waste-generating nuclear power stations.

The group also warned that many of the 537 sites identified might be considered in future searches for disposal sites. Nirex says that the sites in its list, "will not form the starting point of any new site selection exercise", but admits that, "the geology in the UK has not changed, so sites that were considered suitable previously on geological grounds could be considered suitable in a future site selection process."

Friends of the Earth's director, Tony Juniper said:

"It is an absolute disgrace that the location of these sites has been kept from the public for so long."

"Despite what Ministers might say, Nirex has made it quite clear that each of the sites considered geologically suitable in the past could be considered suitable in the future. Every community named on this list should take steps to help halt plans to expand nuclear power in the UK. The best way to begin dealing with the UK's nuclear waste legacy starts with halting the production of any more".

"We support moves for the safe long-term management of our existing radioactive waste. But the UK's energy future must lie in energy efficiency, the production of safe, renewable energy and the cleaner use of fossil fuels, not in trying to breathe new life into the discredited, dangerous and expensive disaster of nuclear power".

For a full list of all 537 sites see: <http://www.nirex.co.uk/477002/index5.html>