Respondent Details

Name:

Martin C. Lack BSc(Hons) (Geology), MSc (Hydrogeology), FGS CGeol MCIWEM.

Individual Response

Question

Q1

Do you agree that it is not realistic for the Government to wait until fast breeder reactor technology is commercially available before taking a decision on how to manage plutonium stocks?

Response

No. If the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) is the issue then, surely, Depleted Uranium (DU) is much more of a risk that 100 tonnes of Plutonium (Pu)? Assuming this question is not deliberately ambiguous, it does not make sense to spend money (para.3.14) to reprocess Pu into MOX when as it is, Pu represents viable fuel for FBRs: Although not yet commercially viable, FBR is an inevitably-essential technology[1]; as it is madness to waste 99.3% of the Earth's uranium (which cannot be put into a thermal reactor).

Q2

Do you agree that the Government has got to the point where a strategic sift of the options can be taken?

Response

No. As made clear in the Executive Summary of the consultation document (para.21), it is too early to determine the viability of any new MOX plant (although prospects do not seem good). If Pu storage is "safe and secure" (para.1.6) NPT fears are "bogus". Long-term vision (para.1.7) should accept the inevitability of FBR technology; and therefore ensure that Pu remains a viable fuel for such reactors when they are built.

Q3

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[1] See page 12 of von Hippel (2010), in "Fast Breeder Reactor Programs: History and Status". Princeton NJ: IPFM. Available at http://www.fissilematerials.org/blog/2010/02/history_and_status_of_fas.html> [accessed 05/01/2011].

Are the conditions that a preferred option must in due course meet, the right ones?

Response

Yes.

Q4

Is the Government doing the right thing by taking a preliminary policy view and setting out a strategic direction in this area now?

Response

No. Re-use as MOX fuel is known to be economic madness (para.3.14). If so, why throw good money after bad? We already have a massive nuclear waste legacy, in the context of which, an extra 100 extra tonnes of Pu is not really that significant. The UK should resist external, politically-correct, pressure to take any action that will waste more taxpayers' money.

Q5

Is there any other evidence government should consider in coming to a preliminary view?

Response

Whilst the UK Government has decided that a new generation of privately-financed nuclear power stations will be built, operated, and decommissioned at no cost to the taxpayer. We shall all, nevertheless, have to pay the inevitable cost of waste disposal in a deep geological repository to be built; £25 billion according to the DTI's own cost-benefit analysis[2]. The Government should stop being apparently disingenuous (para.3.13); and admit that the private sector will not be paying for the ultimate disposal of any of its waste. This already equates to in excess of £700 per taxpayer and should not be allowed to increase. Therefore, stabilisation involving 2000-fold increase in volume must be ruled-out as a possible course of action.

Q6

Has the Government selected the right preliminary view?

Response

[2] See page 20 of DTI (2007), "Power Generation Cost Benefit Analysis". London: Crown Copyright.

No. Re-use of MOX fuel is not cost-effective and immobilisation for disposal as waste currently has massive cost implications for all taxpayers. Therefore, continued surface storage awaiting the viability of FBR technology is the only sensible option. We live in a world full of potential dangers but, as the recent over-reaction to the stricken plant at Fukishima in Japan shows, the dangers of nuclear technology tend to be widely over-rated. The UK should therefore resist all external pressure to make bad decisions regarding its Pu stocks and focus instead on ensuring the security the much larger worldwide stocks of DU (a much greater security risk also awaiting the viability of FBR technology).

Q7

Are there any other high level options that the Government should consider for long-term management of plutonium?

Response

For the reasons given above, I am in favour of the maintenance of the status quo.