

DECC response to radioactive waste management and new build – problems and policies paper

1. Introduction

This is a brief response to the paper produced by Professor Andy Blowers for the DECC / NGO Forum meeting on the 17 October 2012.

2. Response

We do not propose to provide a response to each point raised in this paper, but we fundamentally disagree with the conclusion of the paper that *“current progress towards a solution is insufficient to legitimise proceeding with new build”*.

To be brief we have made the following observations against key points in the summary of this paper:

Inventory

The NDA has undertaken disposability assessments of wastes arising from the operation and decommissioning of the two new nuclear reactor types that are being considered in the UK – the AP1000 and the EPR (November 2009).

The report “concluded that, compared with legacy wastes and existing spent fuel, no new issues arise that challenge the fundamental disposability of the wastes and spent fuel expected to arise from operation of both designs of reactor. This conclusion is supported by the similarity of the wastes to those expected to arise from the existing PWR at Sizewell B. Given a disposal site with suitable characteristics, the wastes and spent fuel from the UK EPR and AP1000 are expected to be disposable.”

(More can be found at: <http://www.nda.gov.uk/news/disposability-assessment.cfm>)

Therefore, there is a strong rationale for disposing of new build waste alongside legacy wastes since no new technical issues arise. Potential host communities will be involved in the decision making process on the inventory to be disposed of in a geological disposal facility.

Long-term storage

Government policy is to pursue the geological disposal of higher activity radioactive waste, whilst recognising the need to take account of developments in storage and disposal options, as well as possible new technologies and solutions. This is documented in the MRWS White Paper (see section 4.32).

Siting process should continue to keep alternative management options open

Government recognises the need to take account of developments in storage and disposal options, as well as possible new technologies and solutions. The NDA has a responsibility to keep options under review and Government will look to CoRWM to provide independent scrutiny and advice on the NDA research programme. This is fully in line with the MRWS White Paper.

Separate process for new build wastes

The management of new build wastes was assessed in the Nuclear Energy White Paper (2008) and the MRWS White Paper (and preceding public consultations); the Nuclear NPS (and associated public consultations); and is considered during the regulators' Generic Design Assessment process. The Requesting Parties are required to demonstrate that there is a radioactive waste management strategy, that there are detailed proposals for the management of operational intermediate level wastes (ILW), and that there is a viable option for the management of spent fuel. The Financing of new build wastes has also been subject to public consultation.

Discussion at the local level on the proposed inventory is a key part of the MRWS process.

Indefinite storage

Government want to avoid indefinite storage of waste and this is one of the reason for seeking to implement geological disposal.

Proceeding with the new build programme

The Government acknowledges that before development consents for new nuclear power stations are granted it needs to be satisfied that effective arrangements exist or will exist to manage and dispose of the waste they will produce.