

Meeting:	NuLeAF Steering Group, 5 th December 2018
Agenda Item:	6
Subject:	Update on the GDF siting process
Author:	Philip Matthews
Purpose:	To report on recent developments related to the proposed Geological Disposal Facility

Introduction:

This report provides an update on recent developments related to the process for identifying a Geological Disposal Facility. It covers:

- GDF siting process;
- RWM Update;
- Report from IAEA meeting, Vienna; and
- CoRWM Update.

Recommendation:

This report is for noting.

Background information

The UK Government **White Paper on Geological Disposal** and other information on government policy is available here¹. Information on the work of **Radioactive Waste Management** can be found here².

1. GDF Siting Process

The final **Working with Communities** policy for the Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) siting process is still awaited. At the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) meeting in Edinburgh on the 8th November, CoRWM's Chair Sir Nigel Thrift stated that he believed the launch was 'imminent' and it is understood the Government aspires to launch the policy before the end of the year. However, the huge pressure on Government time caused by the Brexit negotiations continues to pose challenges for all planned policy launches.

NuLeAF's Chair and Executive Director attended a meeting on **Geology and the safe disposal of radioactive waste**, hosted by The Geological Society, in London on the 26th October. The meeting included presentations from BEIS, RWM, the British Geological Survey and The Geological Society. These set out the current state of knowledge about sub-surface geology across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and presented a range of tools that have been developed by RWM and partners to explain the geological aspects of the GDF siting process. These include a series of short videos in which

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/geological-disposal-facility-gdf-for-high-activity-radioactive-waste>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/radioactive-waste-management>

RWM staff explain the geological context, the different elements of the work being undertaken on geology and the means by which a suitable sub-surface site will be identified.

The materials developed, and in particular the videos, received a positive response from the audience. However, in discussion NuLeAF and others highlighted the challenges facing RWM in engaging in public discussion around geology once the siting process is launched.

2. RWM Update

RWM is developing a **Site Evaluation (SE)** document which, once the siting process is launched, will be used to set out the methodology and range of criteria that will be used in assessing the relative merits of different possible GDF sites. Steve Reece of RWM will speak on the draft SE to the December 2018 NuLeAF Steering Group meeting. A public consultation on Site Evaluation is also expected to be launched before the end of the year.

RWM's **Prospectus**, outlining the offer for communities, is due for publication in the coming weeks. Dr Stephen Brown of RWM presented a draft to the last NuLeAF Steering Group and was provided with a range of feedback and comment. A central message from members was that there had to be greater clarity on the overall financial package on offer to local authorities and communities.

Finally, The Environment Agency (EA) and the Office of Nuclear Regulation (ONR) have published a **Joint Regulators Assessment of the 2016 generic Disposal System Safety Case³**. The assessment can only be generic at this stage, as no site has been identified, and the aim is to provide advice and comment to RWM on regulatory matters. It covers a range of issues including transport, operational and environmental safety along with retrievability and the inventory for disposal.

The EA and ONR conclude that they have not identified any fundamental regulatory issues that would prevent RWM developing a safety case that met regulatory requirements. However, they note that *'there is a significant amount of work for RWM to do to develop a comprehensive, site-specific safety case'* and that *'many aspects can only be evaluated when a site is selected.'* Among the recommendations are that RWM clarify the approach to retrievability. Also, it suggests they should continue to revise the inventory for disposal taking into account new developments that might affect assumptions regarding waste volumes and types destined for disposal.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/756205/Joint_regulators_assessment_of_the_2016_generic_Disposal_System_Safety_Case.pdf

3. Report from IAEA meeting, Vienna

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) provided funding for NuLeAF to send a delegation to their **Technical Meeting on Learning from the experience of local communities in stakeholder involvement in radioactive waste management** held in Vienna from the 12th to 16th November 2018. This was a follow up to an initial meeting held in December 2017 and attended by NuLeAF.

In addition to NuLeAF's Chair and Executive Director, the IAEA also invited two further NuLeAF members to participate:

- **Cllr David Moore** of Copeland Borough Council who was asked to give a local government perspective on engagement with the nuclear industry in Cumbria and the Council's work with the LLWR.
- **Doug Bamsey** of Sedgemoor District Council who spoke on his local authority's role in working across the Hinkley Point A, B and C sites to deliver the best outcomes for communities.

This meeting was considerably larger than the first session, with 95 attendees from 25 nations. This was in part due to a combination of the IAEA meeting with the AGM of the Group of Municipalities with Nuclear Facilities (GMF) which NuLeAF delegates were also able to participate in.

The IAEA event heard from a great variety of speakers drawn from local government, regulators and radioactive waste management bodies across many countries from Canada to Bangladesh. In addition to the two UK presentations, NuLeAF's Director acted as one of three rapporteurs for the meeting. A final report on this work will be published in due course.

4. CoRWM update

NuLeAF's Executive Director attended CoRWM's plenary meeting in Edinburgh on the 8th November. CoRWM provided an update on their work programme along with presentations on progress with decommissioning of Hunterston A and Dounreay.

At the meeting CoRWM announced it had published a number of new **position papers**, intended to set out in a concise way the Committee's current position on aspects of geological disposal. To date four papers have been published. These cover transport, geology, and safety requirements. There is also a new position paper restating their commitment to geological disposal over indefinite storage⁴. A further paper on retrievability is expected by the end of the year.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?departments%5B%5D=committee-on-radioactive-waste-management>

CoRWM has published its **Annual Report for 2017-18**⁵. This looks at the work it has carried out in scrutinising the Geological Disposal Facility siting process and sets out planned activities for the coming year. In its conclusions the Report states that the Committee '*can foresee no scenario under which a GDF would not be a key part of the necessary solution*' and that 2018/19 '*will be critical to the ultimate success of implementing a GDF founded on identifying a suitable site and a willing community.*' (p.25)

BEIS Has also published a **Tailored Review** of CoRWM⁶. The first such review since 2015, the report assesses the body in terms of:

- Form and function
- Improving effectiveness and efficiency
- Governance

The review states that '*there are clear and persuasive reasons why the role performed by CoRWM continues to be needed and should be delivered by them.*' The Committee was felt to be well respected by relevant stakeholders and have a good relationship with Government and RWM. However, it was suggested that there was a need for clarification of some aspects of CoRWM's remit, particularly that the Committee and its sponsors consider to what extent CoRWM should support public engagement.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-radioactive-waste-management-corwm-14th-annual-report-2017-to-2018>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750127/corwm-tailored-review-2018.pdf