

ITEM 6: UPDATE ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT



Report to RWPG, 21st July 2021

This report provides an update on recent developments in radioactive waste management. It covers:

- NDA update;
- BEIS update;
- Waste Technical Advisory Board (WTAB) report
- Nuleaf Policy Briefing on Socio-economics, Sustainability and Climate Change;
- Decommissioning of EDF Stations;
- ONR Update;
- Fusion siting process; and
- Ministry of Defence (MOD) Update.

1. NDA update

1.1 Nuleaf's Executive Director has participated in a number of meetings of the NDA's **Theme Overview Groups (TOGs)** over recent months.

The **Site Decommissioning and Remediation (SDR) TOG** met in May and early July. The Group is currently developing its work plan, taking forward commitments set out in the new NDA Strategy. This will focus on four core themes of Decommissioning, End States, Interim States and Land Use. While many of the activities are technical, planned work in 2021/21 includes the development of:

- End State guidance along with updated end state assumptions for each site.
- A National Narrative on waste management and sustainable remediation.
- A revised Value Framework.
- Guidance on planning for on-site disposal (see below).
- Thinking on sustainability and social value factors and indicators.

The July meeting heard the perspectives of stakeholders, including Nuleaf and Copeland Borough Council, on their priorities for the SDR agenda and how these can be addressed within the NDA's plans for the coming year.

The meeting also discussed the NDA's planned **Code of Practice** which will guide decisions on how to prioritise decommissioning across the NDA estate when the hazards at the Magnox sites are broadly similar in nature. There is a commitment to stakeholder engagement as a core element of the Code, and to ensure it is guided

by the refreshed **NDA Value Framework**. Nuleaf will continue to engage as this is developed.

1.2 The **Integrated Waste Management (IWM) TOG** on the 19th May involved a discussion on the IWM Strategy Work Plan and priorities for 2021/22. The aims are to:

- Adopt a risk-informed approach to sustainable waste management that supports developing government policies.
- Ensure that NDA and SLCs understand the value that IWM can deliver.
- Give proper consideration of the Waste Hierarchy and embrace the value of the circular economy.
- Ensure access to NDA Group capability as opposed to a site-by-site approach.

Stakeholder engagement is a central theme of the new Strategy and group members, including Phil Matthews of Nuleaf and Rob Ward of Copeland Borough Council, offered their perspective.

1.3 On the 12th July the **Low Level Waste Repository (LLWR) Ltd.** became a subsidiary of the NDA¹. This marks the end of the PBO model for the major elements of the NDA's operations. It also represents a significant step towards creating a single waste division, due for launch in 2022.

2. BEIS Update

2.1 Public consultation on the new **Nuclear Decommissioning and Radioactive Substances Policy** has now been delayed until autumn 2021. There will be a single consultation document, but with two distinct parts. Part I will focus on consultation proposals: in particular it will set out the proposed changes to the management of solid radioactive waste including a policy framework for near surface disposal of ILW in England and Wales. Part II will be a draft of the policy framework as it would appear if the consultation proposals were implemented.

A copy of the draft consultation documents has been shared with Nuleaf and comments have been submitted.

2.2 BEIS has published a **Departmental Review of the NDA**², which Nuleaf provided evidence for. This looked at the functions, form, performance and governance of the authority. In general, the Review is supportive of the moves towards 'One NDA' and reforms undertaken as a response to the Magnox contract issues. However, among its conclusions are that:

¹ [Low Level Waste Repository becomes a subsidiary of the NDA - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

² [Nuclear Decommissioning Authority: departmental review - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

- NDA needs to continue to drive up its understanding of the state of its sites, something that would be easier with a more streamlined governance structure.
- NDA should explain, publicly, how through a more prioritised approach to remediation it will be able to make some sites available earlier for alternative use, and at lower cost.
- The Authority should not broaden its remit to include functions that enable it to specifically act as a development agency for new nuclear. However, NDA should advise ministers on the optimal balance between its core clean up mission and seeking opportunities for commercial revenue.
- NDA offers little evidence that its socio-economic support, while useful and valued by communities, is fully integrated with wider Government objectives.
- Government should allow the NDA space and time to deliver its mission without unnecessary interruption. This requires a streamlining of engagement between NDA and Government.

The report makes 23 recommendations which include:

Recommendation 2: *BEIS should consider how it can work with the NDA to help it measure and evaluate: (i) the impact of its socio-economic activities, including the benefits to the delivery of the NDA’s core mission; and (ii) NDA’s net zero targets; ensuring that the overall strategic approach aligns with wider socio-economic priorities as well as the Energy Act requirements, and are given the right level of challenge and support by central government.*

Recommendation 4: *The NDA Board should keep under regular review, the appropriate balance between core clean-up and decommissioning and pursuing new commercial opportunities to secure additional revenue on the other, and report its findings to BEIS, who may then wish to give the NDA a clearer steer as to the desired policy outcome. This should consider: the skills, expertise and capacity available to the NDA; the level of additional risk any new commercial activity would create for the Government; the extent to which the Board and executive team would be able to dedicate appropriate oversight and control to such activity; and the direct and indirect opportunities it might create for the delivery of the core mission.*

2.3 BEIS has also published the NDA’s **Framework Document 2021**³ that sets out the governance and management framework for the Authority.

3. Waste Technical Advisory Board (WTAB) Report

3.1 Nuleaf was invited to speak to the national Waste Technical Advisory Board (WTAB) on the 16th July. The WTAB links to a series of regional waste networks and also involves the UK Government (MHCLG) and the Environment Agency. They have an interest in all aspects of waste planning and a focus on the Duty to Co-operate.

³ [Nuclear Decommissioning Authority Framework Document - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94444/nuclear-decommissioning-authority-framework-document-2021.pdf)

Phil Matthews of Nuleaf spoke alongside Jayne Petersen and Rachel Whaley from Cumbria County Council and Steve Smith of Copeland Borough Council. A verbal update will be provided to the meeting.

4. Nuleaf Policy and Briefing on Socio-economics, Sustainability and Climate Change

4.1 Nuleaf has drafted a new Policy and Briefing Paper, which have been shared with members. When agreed these will replace the current Policy on Socio-economics and Briefing Paper on Socio-economic Funds. The paper updates Nuleaf's position in light of new commitments in Strategy 4 and the NDA's plans for work on social value, sustainability and climate change.

Members are invited to provide comments on either paper by **Friday the 27th August**. These will then be revised and tabled for further discussion and approval at the Steering Group on September the 15th.

5. Decommissioning of EDF Stations

5.1 After many months of delay, the government announced on the 23rd June that BEIS had reached an agreement with EDF and the Nuclear Liabilities Fund (NLF) over the decommissioning of the UK's fleet of 7 Advanced Gas Cooled (AGR) reactors⁴.

Under the agreement, the AGR's will be defueled by EDF before being transferred to the NDA, with Magnox as the Site Licence Company (SLC). The Government believes that this arrangement will achieve £1Bn of savings without compromising on safety or security.

Hunterston B will begin defueling first, by January 2022, followed by Hinkley Point B by the middle of next year. It has also been announced that Dungeness B has closed with immediate effect and will commence low-rate defueling in the second half of 2022. All four of the remaining AGR stations will cease generation by 2030, although EDF has recently suggested that a further two plants, Torness and Heysham 2 may be at risk of early closure due to safety fears⁵.

5.2 Nuleaf's secretariat held their quarterly meeting with EDF on the 15th July where they were joined by **Pip Hatt** who has been appointed Head of Future Mission Communications at Magnox.

⁴ [Advanced Gas Cooled Reactor \(AGR\) decommissioning: factsheet - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94444/Advanced_Gas_Cooled_Reactor_(AGR)_decommissioning_factsheet.pdf)

⁵ [EDF Warns More Nuclear Plants Could Shut Early - Simply Switch](https://www.simpleswitch.co.uk/news/edf-warns-more-nuclear-plants-could-shut-early)

It was agreed that EDF will attend the September Steering Group. At the meeting they will provide a short update on the agreement and seek input from members on a standalone meeting for Nuleaf members to be held in late 2021 or early 2022. This will be held online with senior representatives of Government, NDA and EDF in attendance. Members will be notified of the date for this when confirmed.

6. ONR Update

6.1 ONR has published its **Corporate Plan 2021/22**⁶. This compliments the recently published **ONR Strategy for 2020-25**⁷.

7. Fusion siting process

7.1 On the 11th June the Government published the initial list of 15 sites that are being considered for the STEP fusion plant development⁸. These include a number of existing NDA and nuclear sites including Dounreay, Chapelcross, Moorside, Heysham and Oldbury/Berkeley.

Interestingly, the list also includes sites in local authority areas which do not currently host nuclear sites. Four locations in Scotland have also been proposed, with the Scottish Government not objecting to fusion power development. A decision on the final site is expected by the end of 2022.

7.2 Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, has announced his backing for the construction of a large-scale fusion demonstration plant in Oxfordshire⁹. The development will be built at Culham, which is the home of the UK's national fusion research programme. The cost is expected to be around \$400 million and it aims to be operational by 2025.

8. Ministry of Defence Update

8.1 The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is currently developing its **Nuclear Liabilities Management Strategy (NLMS)**, with the final Strategy due for publication towards the end of 2021. They have spoken at a number of TOGs over recent months and intend to share sections of the new Strategy with the Groups for comment.

Nuleaf raised two issues in discussion: whether a formal public consultation was planned and whether it was intended to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) or Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Strategy. The MOD stated

⁶ [Office for Nuclear Regulation corporate plan 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97822/office-for-nuclear-regulation-corporate-plan-2021-to-2022.pdf)

⁷ [Office for Nuclear Regulation strategy 2020 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97822/office-for-nuclear-regulation-strategy-2020-to-2025.pdf)

⁸ [UK's prototype fusion energy plant is one step closer to finding a home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-prototype-fusion-energy-plant-is-one-step-closer-to-finding-a-home)

⁹ [Nuclear energy: Fusion plant backed by Jeff Bezos to be built in UK - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-55844444)

that it did not intend to undertake either. Nuleaf expressed disappointment at this, representing as it does a significant departure from the active engagement process undertaken as part of the Submarine Dismantling Project (SDP).

8.2 The MOD has also published an update on progress with the **Submarine Dismantling Project (SDP)**¹⁰. This notes that progress has been limited but that LLW has been removed from two submarines with work now started on a third, HMS Revenge. The project is over budget and well behind schedule.

¹⁰ [Submarine Dismantling Project - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)