

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 15th June 2022
Item: 4
Subject: Updates on national developments in radioactive waste management
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Introduction:

This paper updates members on recent developments in radioactive waste management and NDA operations. It covers:

- NDA Group update;
- Regulators update;
- Decommissioning of AGR Stations; and
- International news;

Recommendation:

This paper is for noting.

1. NDA Group update

1.1 The NDA and Cwmni Eginio have announced they will work together on proposals for the siting of a new nuclear development at Trawsfynydd¹. Cwmni Eginio (CE) is a development company wholly owned by the Welsh Government, established to drive future development at the Trawsfynydd site and to promote regional economic and social regeneration.

As part of this arrangement, the NDA will share information about the characteristics of the available land at the site and its decommissioning plans, to support schedule and work-force planning. It has also committed to support Cwmni Eginio in the development of its socio-economic plans and to offer an opportunity for the organisation to engage with potential developers and technology providers.

Any formal commitment of NDA land, or other support, would require Government approval via NDA's sponsoring department BEIS.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-collaboration-to-support-potential-future-development-at-trawsfynydd>

1.2 The NDA's **Business Plan 2022-25** was released in March² and outlines the key activities the Authority plans to undertake across all its sites over that time period.

1.3 The first NDA **Sustainability Strategy**³ has also been published. This sets out their sustainability vision, namely *'to be recognised as a leader in transforming nuclear legacies into opportunities for local, regional and national sustainable development.'* It also outlines their planned sustainability legacies in terms of decommissioning, socio-economics, the environment and culture.

1.4 It has been suggested to the Dounreay Site Stakeholder Group (SSG) that Magnox is likely to take over responsibility for the decommissioning of the **Vulcan** site in Caithness⁴. This is the UK's naval reactor test establishment and has been operated by the Ministry of Defence for many decades. Decommissioning of the nearby Dounreay site will also be taken forward by Magnox.

1.5 It has been confirmed that Sellafield's **Magnox Reprocessing Plant** will permanently close in July⁵. Since beginning operation in 1964 the plant has reprocessed almost 55,000 tonnes of spent nuclear fuel from the UK, Italy and Japan. Employee numbers in the plant are expected to remain stable during the post operational clean up phase which will last around 2 years.

David Peattie, chief executive of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), commented *'The end of reprocessing at Magnox marks the successful completion of the NDA's Magnox Operating Programme.....Sellafield can now move from the reprocessing phase of its life into a future focused on decommissioning and clean-up.'*

1.6 Nuleaf's Executive Director participated in meetings of the **Site Decommissioning and Remediation (SDR) TOG** on the 3rd May, the **Critical Enablers (CE) TOG** on the 13th May and the **Integrated Waste Management Programme (IWMP) Regulatory Meeting** on the 26th May. Updates provided included on:

Stakeholder Engagement: John McNamara provided an update to the CE TOG meeting. He noted that:

- NDA Group is in the process of establishing two NGO fora, one on the GDF siting process, and one on general NDA operations.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nuclear-decommissioning-authority-business-plan-2022-to-2025>

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nda-group-sustainability-strategy-2022?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&utm_source=7dac7fe0-7ca9-4313-b878-fc4f43f09e7b&utm_content=immediately

⁴ <https://caithness-business.co.uk/article/16449>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/operations-to-end-at-sellafields-magnox-reprocessing-plant>

- He is working with the SSGs to help support an expansion of web and social media communications and to encourage a greater diversity of people to participate in their work.
- The NDA will launch a new stakeholder survey over the summer.
- They are developing plans for the reform of engagement and hope to announce these at the Edinburgh Stakeholder Summit this autumn.

Innovation: The NDA has launched its first **Innovation Strategy**⁶. This is intended to help develop skills, knowledge and better ways of working in order to drive sustainable and rapid decommissioning, create a safer working environment and return sites to community use earlier at lower overall cost.

Update of the LLWR Site End State: The NDA has asked LLW Repository to undertake a review of the end state for their site, building on work done previously. The new review has identified a number of preferred options include for leaving safe structures in situ and exploring opportunities for the early release and/or interim uses of some areas of the site. This is now being developed into a strategic framework.

1.7 Nuleaf continues to engage with the NDA as they develop their **Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) Working Group**. A meeting has been organised for the 20th June involving local authority planning officers and the NDA. The aim of the meeting is to discuss the NDA's proposals for the Working Group and to explore key issues including Permitted Development Rights, Masterplanning and views on the scale and pace of remediation on sites. A report will be provided to the next Steering Group meeting.

2. Regulators update

2.1 Nuleaf's Chair and Executive Director took part in an Environment Agency meeting on strategic reviews in nuclear decommissioning, held online on the 1st and 10th June. As part of the event Cllr David Moore joined a panel discussion on transparency and communications. A verbal update will be provided at the Steering Group meeting.

3. Decommissioning of AGR stations

3.1 The removal of nuclear fuel from **Hunterston B** nuclear power station began in May 2022, just 4 months after generation ceased on the site. Over 300 channels of fuel will be taken from each of the reactors to be stripped and processed. They will

⁶ <https://nda.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/31/the-ndas-grand-challenges-for-technical-innovation/>

then be placed in an on-site fuel storage pond to cool before being packaged in flasks and transported by rail to Sellafield.

Over the next three years the station will send around 350 of these flasks to Cumbria for processing and storage. Defueling will remove 99% of the nuclear material from the site before it is handed over to Magnox to carry on with decommissioning.

3.2 EDF Energy has rejected a suggestion from the UK Government that the **Hinkley B power** plant should be kept open past the current planned closure date. Culture Minister Chris Philp had suggested that Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng 'is considering whether Hinkley B, the large nuclear power station, might continue beyond its planned end of life'⁷ to help deal with the energy crisis caused by conflict in Ukraine⁷. Hinkley Point B was scheduled to permanently close in July 2022.

When asked about the risks and if the Government has any concerns about Hinkley Point B, Mr Philp said: '*Well, obviously when it comes to nuclear power generation, or indeed any power generation, safety is paramount. So, no extension to the life of any power station in the UK, least of all a nuclear one, would take place unless the safety certification had been done in a very thorough way.*'

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) wrote to ONR to request that no extension to the operation of the plant is granted⁸.

3.3 The **Public Accounts Committee** of the UK Parliament has published a report on the future of the AGRs⁹.

This concludes that the cost of decommissioning the 7 AGR nuclear stations, plus Sizewell B, has nearly doubled to £23.5Bn and is likely to rise further. An additional £10.7Bn of taxpayer funding has been added to the Nuclear Liabilities Fund over the last 2 years to bridge the gap.

The PAC expressed concerns as to whether the NDA had the capacity to manage the clean-up of the AGRs in addition to its other responsibilities. It also notes '*The pace at which the stations can be defuelled could have a big impact on the costs, between £3.1bn and £8bn depending on the time taken ...Successful defuelling will depend on all parties being ready and working together, including the NDA being ready to receive and dismantle the volume of fuel arriving at Sellafield. Any delays in the defuelling process could result in costs increasing substantially.*

⁷ <https://www.bridportnews.co.uk/news/national/20174859.hinkley-point-b-nuclear-power-plant-get-life-extension-minister-suggests/>

⁸ [Stand firm against demands to extend reactor life: anti-nuclear activists' plea to regulator \(nuclearpolicy.info\)](https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/news/stand-firm-against-demands-to-extend-reactor-life-anti-nuclear-activists-plea-to-regulator)

⁹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/127/public-accounts-committee/news/170906/taxpayer-on-the-hook-for-billions-in-extra-nuclear-plant-decommissioning-costs/>

'The handover agreement does not appear to sufficiently 'incentivise cost efficiency and ensure a smooth transfer of defuelled stations to the NDA'.'

4. International news

4.1 Nia Swann Bowden of Gwynedd Council and Nuleaf's Executive Director were invited to speak at the **RICOMET** conference in Utrecht on the 11th May on the **Social Aspects of Decommissioning**. RICOMET is a pan European network of social scientists looking at the impacts of ionising radiation. A report on the event can be found here¹⁰.

5. Nuleaf update

5.1 Philip Matthews addressed the SSG Chair and Vice Chairs Forum meeting on the 20th May. While some SSG Chair and Vice Chairs are actively engaged in Nuleaf, other have had less involvement in our work. The session proved useful in explaining Nuleaf's role and provoked a wider discussion on our work in the UK and overseas.

¹⁰ <https://www.ssh-share.eu/ricomet-2022/>