

ITEM 6: UPDATE ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT



Report to RWPG, 30th April 2024

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

- NDA Group update;
- UK Government update;
- Nuleaf news;
- Regulatory update;
- New nuclear and fusion updates; and
- EDF news.

1. NDA Group update

1.1 The first meeting of the **Strategy 5 Development Group (S5DG)** was held in Manchester on the 9th April and Doug Bamsey attended on behalf of Nuleaf. One important area of discussion related to how the Critical Enablers for the Strategy are defined and how they support the mission. Nuleaf has since commented on the Terms of Reference for the Group and the Executive Director will participate in future meetings.

It was confirmed that the process of developing the draft Strategy will run until January 2025. There will be a 12-week consultation on the draft, commencing on the 19th May next year. Nuleaf plans to run an engagement session for members to help inform our consultation response.

1.2 Phil Matthews and Jonathan Cook attended a **Critical Enablers (CE) TOG** meeting on the 22nd April.

At the meeting Jamie Reed, NDA Director of Social Value, gave a presentation on plans for developing the NDA's Socio-economic approach through Strategy 5. Jamie also mentioned that a refresh of the recently published Social Impact and

Communities Strategy will take place in 2026, taking on board any changes in approach driven by Strategy 5.

In response to questions from Nuleaf's Director, Jamie:

- Noted that the process of preparing the next round of studies on the impacts of Sellafield, Dounreay and Magnox would begin soon. In line with Nuleaf's request, these studies would be broadened to include social issues rather than be focussed solely on economic impacts.
- Agreed that there was scope for engaging Nuleaf/local authorities in developing a reporting framework covering socio-economics and sustainability measures. A meeting between Phil, Jamie and Davide Stronati, NDS Director of Sustainability, has been arranged to discuss this further.
- Agreed it would be useful to discuss the NDA's aspiration to help support the capability and capacity of local authorities to work in partnership with NDA on socio-economic action.

Jacq Longrigg, NDA Head of Leadership, Skills and Talent provided an update on People and Skills. She highlighted:

- The launch of **Destination Nuclear**¹ as a new portal for careers in the nuclear sector. As part of the promotion of this, adverts have been placed in large stations in London and other major cities.
- The need to address workforce issues, with 38% of NDA staff being over the age of 50 and increased competition for staff from new nuclear and defence. In response the NDA has launched www.NDAgroup.careers as the first bespoke recruitment website for the organisation; along with a greater presence on social media.

Jacq stated that she would welcome an opportunity to speak to Nuleaf members on this work and that is in the process of being organised.

1.3 The NDA has launched its **Social Impact and Communities Strategy**² and **Business Plan 2024-27**³ following consultation with Nuleaf and other stakeholders.

The Social Impact and Communities Strategy notes that there were 20 responses to the consultation and sets out how the NDA has responded to the points made. The final Strategy accepts the requests from Nuleaf for more action on the development of a reporting framework and in broadening the scope of future studies of value beyond economic measures and to include metrics of social impact. As noted in 1.2,

¹ <https://www.destinationnuclear.com/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nda-social-impact-and-communities-strategy-april-2024>

³ [Nuclear Decommissioning Authority: Business Plan 2024 to 2027 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nuclear-decommissioning-authority-business-plan-2024-to-2027)

discussion on these issues between NDA and Nuleaf will be taken forward in coming months.

1.4 **Peter Hill** has been announced as the new Chair of the NDA. He is currently chair of Keller Group plc, the world's largest geotechnical projects operation. He has previously been Chair and a non-executive director on the Boards of a number of organisations spanning the manufacturing, research, aerospace, defence and chemicals industries amongst others⁴. In government, Peter has been a non-executive board member of UK Trade and Investment, the Royal Air Force and an agency of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

It has also been announced that **Lawrie Haynes** has been appointed as the interim Chair of Sellafield, while retaining his role as Chair of Nuclear Restoration Services⁵.

1.5 It has been announced that the clean-up of the **Dounreay** site will now take decades longer to complete, with the end date moving from 2033 until the 2070s⁶.

According to Dounreay, the revised lifetime plan 'provides a credible and robust route map to reach the site's interim end state – the point at which all redundant facilities have been cleared and the resultant radioactive waste can be stored safely at the site. The new strategy prioritises the early completion of work to dismantle the fast reactors and empty two historic waste disposal and storage facilities. Work will continue in the Fuel Cycle Area with the aim of finding new and innovative approaches that will benefit decommissioning throughout the UK.'

Separately, workers at the Dounreay site are being balloted on strike action following what the Unite Union described as an 'inadequate' pay offer of 4.5%⁷.

1.6 The workforce at **Hunterston**⁸ will fall by around one third by 2026 as the site enters the next phase of decommissioning. The remaining 244 staff will then transfer from EDF to Nuclear Restoration Services following the completion of defueling at the B site. Overall, the workforce will have halved by that point compared to the 500 workers employed in 2020.

1.7 The first of 236 skips of nuclear waste has been removed from the **Magnox Storage Pond** at Sellafield. The skip contains zeolites which were placed in the ponds in the 1970s and 1980s to absorb radiation. It is the first waste to be placed in a new Self Shielded Box and will be placed at Sellafield's interim storage facility before disposal in a GDF⁹.

⁴ [Peter Hill CBE appointed as new Chair of the NDA - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/peter-hill-cbe-appointed-as-new-chair-of-the-nda)

⁵ [NDA announces appointment of Interim Chair of Sellafield Board - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nda-announces-appointment-of-interim-chair-of-sellafield-board)

⁶ <https://www.johnogroat-journal.co.uk/news/plan-to-extend-decommissioning-work-at-dounreay-until-the-20-345764/>

⁷ [Dounreay nuclear power station workers in Highlands set to walk out in dispute over pay | STV News](https://www.stvnews.com/news/2024/04/30/dounreay-nuclear-power-station-workers-in-highlands-set-to-walk-out-in-dispute-over-pay/)

⁸ [Hunterston workforce set to be cut by nearly a third | Irvine Times](https://www.irvinetimes.com/news/2024/04/30/hunterston-workforce-set-to-be-cut-by-nearly-a-third/)

⁹ [Sellafield pond nuclear waste clear-up starts - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-66144444)

1.7 Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS) has announced that 2,100 tonnes of solid radioactive waste have now been retrieved from **Hunterston A**, representing 85% of the Intermediate Level Waste (ILW) inventory. The waste was transported via underground tunnels and stored in one of five above-ground concrete bunkers that were constructed on site between the 1960s and 1980s. The Solid Active Waste Bunker Retrieval (SAWBR) project was established to remove the waste and empty the five bunkers in sequence by breaking through the walls one by one. The completion of this work is viewed as a significant milestone, with the remaining ILW inventory comprised of residual sludges in spent fuel storage ponds¹⁰.

1.8 A major collaboration between Nuclear Waste Services (NWS), Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS) and Nuclear Transport Solutions (NTS) to manage and permanently dispose of more than 1,000 drums of waste, has been completed¹¹. The project has seen eleven consignments of LLW transported by rail from Winfrith to the Low-Level Waste Repository (LLWR) in Cumbria for final disposal.

The waste originated from the Steam Generating Heavy Water Reactor at Winfrith, which shut down in 1990. The drums were initially characterised as Intermediate Level Waste and put in interim storage. However, after a period of time resulting in significant radioactive decay, and further technical analysis by NWS, the waste was re-characterised as low-level waste. This has allowed them to be disposed of at the LLWR.

1.7 An episode of the BBC's Business Daily, focussed on the decommissioning of the Hinkley Point A and B sites, has been released. It can be listened to here¹².

2. UK Government update

2.1 In an appearance at the House of Commons Liaison Committee on the 26th of March the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, announced a 'national endeavour' to build the nuclear workforce to support energy security and defence¹³. As part of this, around £750 million will be invested in skills, jobs and education by 2030 through a partnership with the nuclear industry, including BAE, Rolls Royce, EDF and Babcock. This is intended to help the sector fill an estimated 40,000 new jobs by the end of the decade.

¹⁰ [Hunterston A achieves major milestone in waste storage - Nuclear Engineering International \(neimagazine.com\)](https://www.neimagazine.com/news/hunterston-a-achieves-major-milestone-in-waste-storage)

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/collaborative-project-safely-disposing-of-over-1000-drums-of-radioactive-waste-completes>

¹² [Business Daily - How to shut down a nuclear power station - BBC Sounds](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-58144444)

¹³ [PM announces 'national endeavour' to build nuclear workforce and warns of China 'threat' | New Civil Engineer](https://www.newcivilengineer.com/news/pm-announces-national-endeavour-to-build-nuclear-workforce-and-warns-of-china-threat/)

2.2 The **Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee** of the Welsh Senedd has published a report on the future of nuclear development in Wales¹⁴. It calls on the UK Government to decide soon on the future of the Wylfa and Trawsfynydd sites, and backs new nuclear development at both. It also urges the Welsh Government to be ready to ensure that the maximum benefits to the Welsh economy are delivered.

2.3 It has also been announced that the UK Government will purchase the Wylfa and Oldbury sites from Hitachi in a £160 million deal¹⁵. This was welcomed during a Senedd debate on the report on April 17th ¹⁶.

Gwen Parry-Jones, GBN's Chief Executive, commented *'These two sites at Wylfa and Oldbury have tremendous potential and present a significant opportunity for Britain and for local communities. Each location has a long history of hosting the UK nuclear industry and has experienced the enormous benefits that nuclear power can bring to their local and regional economies..... We look forward to engaging with each community in what we hope will be a long and fruitful dialogue. As our thinking moves forward, we will update local residents and their representatives in the Wylfa and Oldbury areas'*.¹⁷

3. Nuleaf news

3.1 Nuleaf's **Annual Gathering 2024** will be held in Llandudno on the 18th and 19th June, with accommodation and dinner on the 17th available for those who have long journeys to make. The programme will include a visit to Trawsfynydd and presentations and discussions on engagement and socio-economics. Member interest has been high.

3.2 Over recent months Nuleaf's Executive Director and Chair have been in dialogue with the NDA and the **Scottish Council Committee on Radioactive Substances (SCCORS)**, our sister organisation north of the border.

It has been agreed that a SCCORS Co-ordinator is appointed to work 3 days a week in support of the Scottish network with all funding and costs being met by the NDA. The officer's line management would be by Nuleaf's Executive Director, with their work programme developed by SCCORS in consultation with Nuleaf.

This proposal was approved by the March 2024 Nuleaf Steering Group and discussions are now underway to take the recruitment process forward.

¹⁴ [Decision on Wylfa and Trawsfynydd 'urgently needed'](https://www.senedd.wales/decision-on-wylfa-and-trawsfynydd-urgently-needed) (senedd.wales)

¹⁵ [Budget: UK government to buy Wylfa site in £160m deal - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-64444444)

¹⁶ [Senedd debates future of nuclear energy \(nation.cymru\)](https://www.nation.cymru/senedd-debates-future-of-nuclear-energy)

¹⁷ [Great British Nuclear to buy two Hitachi sites for new nuclear development - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/great-british-nuclear-to-buy-two-hitachi-sites-for-new-nuclear-development)

3.3 Philip Matthews participated in a GMF Europe visit to Loviisa in Finland on the 15th to 17th April. Loviisa hosts a nuclear power plant, built to a Russian design in the 1970s, and also a Low and Intermediate Waste repository, located 110 metres underground at the site on the Baltic Sea. The meeting included visits to both facilities and discussions with the Mayor and officials of Loviisa Municipality, which has recently joined GMF.

3.4 At the request of Avison Young (AY), Nuleaf has been involved in setting up meetings between RWPG members and the consultancy. The aim is to discuss local authority experience of Permitted Development Rights (PRD) and Planning Performance Agreements (PPA). It will help inform AYs work with the NDA.

4. Regulatory update

4.1. The Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) has notified Sellafield Ltd. that it will be prosecuted for alleged information technology security offences between 2019 and 2023, with the first hearing due in June¹⁸. At the end of March, it was also announced that Sellafield's Chief Information Security Office **Richard Meal**¹⁹ would be stepping down later this year. This follows reports in January that **Mark Neate**, the Environment, Safety and Security Director at the site, would be leaving his post in the coming months²⁰.

4.2 The ONR has announced²¹ that the **Imperial College Reactors Centre** in Ascot has become the first reactor site in the UK to be fully decommissioned under modern regulatory controls. The small 100kW research reactor began operations in 1965. It closed in 2012 and defueling was completed two years later with fuel elements transported to Sellafield. Imperial College applied to the ONR in 2015 to begin the decommissioning project.

4.3 The Environment Agency (EA) has written to the Low-Level Waste Repository (LLWR) in Cumbria with concerns about a delay in securing waste at the site. It comes after LLWR failed to make sufficient progress on operations to complete an engineered cap for some of the radioactive waste, meaning it breached the terms of its environmental permit²².

¹⁸ [ONR notifies Sellafield Ltd of intention to prosecute | Office for Nuclear Regulation](#)

¹⁹ [Sellafield's head of information security to step down | Nuclear waste | The Guardian](#)

²⁰ [Sellafield nuclear safety and security director to leave | Energy industry | The Guardian](#)

²¹ [UK research reactor fully decommissioned : Waste & Recycling - World Nuclear News \(world-nuclear-news.org\)](#)

²² [Nuclear waste storage facility told to take action after breach - BBC News](#)

Nuclear Waste Services (NWS), which manages LLWR, said the delays did not have an impact on the surrounding area and that they had taken the time to ensure the right solutions were created for the safe disposal of nuclear waste.

5. New nuclear and fusion updates

5.1 The decommissioning of the **Joint European Torus (JET)** facility at Culham in Oxfordshire has begun following the ending of experiments at the fusion reactor in December²³. It is expected that it will take 12 years to repurpose the reactor. The facility was commissioned in the 1970s and anticipated to operate for a decade, but its life has been repeatedly extended.

5.2 It was announced on the 9th of February that an agreement has been reached to build a privately financed nuclear power station on Teesside²⁴. Community Nuclear Power (CNP) proposes to install 4 Small Modular Reactors in North Tees, producing up to a Gigawatt (GW) of energy. The reactors will be built by US company Westinghouse and are expected to come on stream in the early 2030s.

5.3 A decision on which firms will be selected to roll out Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) in the UK has been delayed from the spring until June 2024 due to fears that unselected bidders could sue over a rushed selection process. This means it is likely that contracts are unlikely to be handed out before the next general election, rather than this summer as originally forecast²⁵.

6. EDF news

6.1 EDF has launched Round 2 of its consultation on plans for the decommissioning of **Hinkley Point B**, with this running until the 27th May 2024. More information on the consultation is provided via their website and an online exhibition space which can be found here²⁶.

²³ [Nuclear fusion reactor decommissioning begins after 40 years - BBC News](#)

²⁴ [Teesside private SMR nuclear power station to be built - BBC News](#)

²⁵ [DiscoverIE proves 'ability to consistently deliver' says Panmure Gordon \(proactiveinvestors.co.uk\)](#)

²⁶ [Hinkley Point B nuclear power station | EDF \(edfenergy.com\)](#)