

ITEM 6: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS

Report to RWPG, 18th July 2024

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

- GDF Community Partnerships;
- Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) and NDA Update;
- International news; and
- CoRWM update.

1. Introduction

1.1 The UK Government's policy on **Working with Communities – implementing geological disposal** was published in December 2018¹, with the equivalent policy for Wales published in January 2019². The **National Policy Statement**, governing the planning aspects of the GDF in England, was published in July 2019³.

2. GDF Community Partnerships

2.1 The calling of a General Election has meant that most activities of the three GDF Community Partnerships have been curtailed for the time being. It is not anticipated that the new Labour Government will make changes to the GDF siting process or the wider approach to radioactive waste management.

South Copeland GDF Community Partnership has published an information page on the current position of the UK Government, Environment Agency and Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) on the complex issue of retrievability of nuclear waste. This can be found here⁴.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-geological-disposal-working-with-communities-long-term-management-of-higher-activity-radioactive-waste>

² <https://gov.wales/geological-disposal-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-guidance-communities>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-policy-statement-for-geological-disposal-infrastructure>

⁴ <https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/gdfs-and-retrievability-what-is-the-uks-position/>

3. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) and NDA Update

3.1 Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) plans to submit a Development Consent Order (DCO) for site characterisation boreholes as early as 2027.

NWS head of major permissions Malcolm Orford told *New Civil Engineer*⁵: 'The first DCO is for our boreholes' because 'any boreholes greater than 150m deep have been deemed nationally significant infrastructure and must be consented via a DCO'.

Orford said that NWS is 'looking to commence drilling in 2029 or 2030 and therefore, to be able to meet that date, we have to submit [the DCO application in] 2027 or 2028'. These dates are not precise but are targets, he added.

3.2 **Eden Nuclear and Environmental (Eden NE)** has completed a study for the NDA and Scottish Government on the technical aspects of Near Surface Disposal (NSD) in Scotland.

The study considered all technical areas relevant to the feasibility of NSD in Scotland, including the policy and regulatory context, design concepts, site characteristics, environmental performance of different concepts, potential Scottish inventory suitable for NSD, transport, nuclear safety and security, cost and schedule.

Eight design concepts with different depths of disposal, access approach and degrees of retrievability were developed. More information can be found here⁶.

4. International news

4.1 The 5-year **EURAD (European Joint Programme on Radioactive Waste Management)** has drawn to a close⁷. A range of publications have been released, including on transparency in the establishment of radioactive waste management (RWM) facilities⁸ and on public participation in the technical aspects of RWM⁹.

Nuleaf's Executive Director was a member of the programmes **Civil Society Group** where he represented both Nuleaf and GMF Europe. It is understood that a EURAD-2 programme will begin in October, but it is not yet clear what representation there will be for local government or wider civil society.

⁵ [Nuclear Waste Services details progress towards boreholes for Geological Disposal Facility | New Civil Engineer](#)

⁶ <https://www.eden-ne.co.uk/projects/technical-investigations-of-the-near-surface-disposal-of-haw-from-sites-in-scotland>

⁷ [EURAD final annual event - Thank you to all participants! | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#)

⁸ [EURAD deliverable D9.17 ROUTES – Implementation of the ROUTES ICS action plan second phase | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#)

⁹ [EURAD - D9.18 Implementation of ROUTES action plan third phase | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#)

5. CoRWM Update

5.1 Members of the **Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM)** have visited the Dounreay and Vulcan sites on the north coast of Scotland.

Dounreay presents complex decommissioning challenges, having been established in 1955 and being the host of world leading research into fast breeder reactors. A particular area of challenge is in the retrieval, characterisation and packaging of wastes from the site's shaft and silo, where past waste management decisions have presented challenges to the current mission.

Vulcan is a Ministry of Defence (MoD) site next door to Dounreay that is now expected to be decommissioned by the NDA. More on the visit can be found here¹⁰.

¹⁰ [CoRWM visits Dounreay nuclear site - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/co-rwm-visits-dounreay-nuclear-site)