

2 Merlin Gardens
Bedford MK41 7HL
20 November, 2009

Rt. Hon. Ed Miliband
Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change
3, Whitehall Place,
London SW1A 2HD

Dear Secretary of State,

New Nuclear Build and the Management of Radioactive Wastes

We write to you as members of the first Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM 1) which presented recommendations on the long term management of solid higher activity wastes to government in 2006. These recommendations were substantially endorsed by government and expressed as policy in its White Paper on *Managing Radioactive Waste Safely* in June 2008 (CM 7386). We wish to express our concern that our recommendations have been seriously misrepresented in your draft National Policy Statement on Nuclear Energy published on November 9th.

In concluding the section on radioactive waste management the NPS states: ‘the Government is satisfied that effective arrangements will exist to manage and dispose of the waste that will be produced from new nuclear power stations. As a result the IPC need not consider this question’ (paragraph 3.8.20).

We contend that it is unknowable whether or not effective arrangements will exist and that the question of management of these wastes on specific sites should be a matter that the IPC must consider.

The policy stated in the *White Paper on Nuclear Energy* is ‘that before development consents for new nuclear power stations are granted, the government will need to be satisfied that effective arrangements exist or will exist to manage and dispose of the waste they will produce’ (CM 7296, 2008, p.99).

In our view this is a matter of judgement not of ineluctable fact. The CoRWM1 proposals for long-term management of radioactive wastes identified a process towards a long-term solution, recognising that deep disposal should be implemented on the basis of ‘an intensified programme of research and development into the long-term safety of geological disposal aimed at reducing uncertainties at generic and site-specific levels, as well as into improved means for storing wastes in the longer-term’ (CoRWM, 2006, rec. 4). Moreover, implementation would also depend on finding a suitable site based on the principle of volunteerism, that is an expressed willingness of a community to participate in a site selection process. Neither the scientific nor the social requirements have yet been met and consequently, in our judgement, it is not possible to conclude that effective arrangements ‘exist or will exist’.

In any case, the policy set out by CoRWM1 and subsequently pursued by government applies to *legacy* wastes alone. CoRWM was quite clear that its proposals should not apply to new build:

‘The main concern in the present context is that the proposals might be seized upon as providing a green light for new build. That is far from the case. New build wastes would extend the timescales for implementation, possibly for very long, but essentially unknowable, future periods. Further, the political and ethical issues raised by the creation of more wastes are quite different from those relating to committed – and, therefore, unavoidable – wastes. Should a new build programme be introduced, in CoRWM’s view it would require a quite separate process to test and validate proposals for the management of the wastes arising.’ (Page 13, *Managing our radioactive wastes safely*, CoRWM’s recommendations to Government, CoRWM document 700, July 2006).

However, it is clear that government has conflated the issue of new build with legacy wastes and thereby intends the CoRWM proposals to apply to both. No separate process, as suggested by CoRWM1, for new build wastes is contemplated. There will be no opportunity for communities selected for new nuclear power stations to consider whether they wish to volunteer to host a long term radioactive waste facility; it will simply be imposed upon them. As the government recognises these wastes may well be stored on site ‘for around 160 years from the start of the power station’s operations, to enable an adequate cooling period for fuel discharged following the end of the power station’s operation.’ (Draft National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation EN-6, 3.8.17). In the absence of a process or acceptable policy for new build wastes, they may remain on site indefinitely. It is quite possible that, as a result of sea level changes, storm surge and coastal processes, conditions at some of the most vulnerable coastal sites will deteriorate thereby making it increasingly difficult to manage the wastes safely.

The problems presented by managing wastes in the very long-term will be both generic and site-specific. Consequently we find it hard to understand why the IPC, when considering applications for the development of individual sites, need not consider the question of waste management. Given the levels of public anxiety raised by the issue of nuclear waste and the burdens of risk and management that are imposed on future generations we believe consideration of safe management of wastes at each site should be a primary concern of the IPC. We invite you to confirm that this would be your expectation.

In conclusion we reiterate that we do not consider it credible to argue that effective arrangements exist or will exist either at a generic or a site-specific level for the long - term management of highly active radioactive wastes arising from new nuclear build. We believe the scrutiny of the arrangements proposed for each site must remain within the remit of the IPC.

We are copying this letter to the Chair of the Infrastructure Planning Commission and the Chair of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management. In the interest of open debate we shall also make these views known to the media.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Andrew Blowers OBE (member of CoRWM1)

Professor Gordon MacKerron (Chairman, CoRWM1)

Mary Allan (member of CoRWM1)

Pete Wilkinson (member of CoRWM1)

cc. Sir Michael Pitt, Chair, Infrastructure Planning Commission
Professor Robert Pickard, Chair, Committee on Radioactive Waste
Management