

173 DEC 2013

The Secretary of State
Department of Energy and Climate Change
(GDF siting process consultation)
Room MO7
55 Whitehall
LONDON SW1A 2EY

29/11/2013

Dear Sir,

We wish to comment as follows on issues related to questions 1-5 in the consultation paper. We write as individuals with no particular views one way or the other on geological disposal.

The proposal that the decision to opt in to the process should be taken at district council level is both a perversion of the idea of localism and a denial of due democratic process. There is a glaring disjuncture between the fact that the government is minded to deal with the process under the NSIP framework and the fact of allowing a district council the power to give what is tantamount to an outline planning permission. This is not the same sort of issue as, for example, whether a housing development should go on a local greenfield site.

In proposing to allow this power of decision the government is interpreting much too narrowly the concept of localism. This over-narrow interpretation is conceded by proposing at the same time the formation of a 'Consultative Partnership', thus confirming that a repository will have wide-ranging impacts during the assessment stage, the construction stage, and during its operation, irrespective of whether both surface facilities and underground facilities end up within one district council area.

All interested parties which have a legitimate claim to be part of a 'Consultative Partnership' have an equally legitimate claim to be part of a decision-making body. In Cumbria, for example, there is a particular issue of the Cumbria tourism brand, and the economic interests of a far greater number of people could be adversely affected than of those who might benefit in the nuclear industry in a small part of West Cumbria. The Deloitte report commissioned by Visit Britain suggests that by 2025 tourism's contribution to the economy could more than double to £257bn. In a context where tourism currently contributes more than £2.1bn to the local economy this is not a minor issue. Other areas of England might well have analogous issues. Any area or interest group ~~is~~ represented in a 'Consultative Partnership' should have their populations consulted as to the acceptability of a GDF at the earliest possible stage in the process and at any subsequent critical point in the process. **This should be the criterion for determining the 'suitably defined area' in which there should be a full-scale referendum or referendums to determine whether or not there is 'community support'.**

It may be 'practical' to propose that a low level of local government should exercise the choice to become a potential GDF site, even though the impacts will be felt outside its area, **but this represents neither localism nor democracy.** The proposal that this same low-tier authority should have exclusively the Right of Withdrawal reinforces this injustice.

The proposals for the 'Consultative Partnership' do not answer the above point. As proposed, the 'Consultative Partnership' would ultimately be

a pointless discussion group since it is not to be vested with any powers. **For it to have any relevance it would need to be the body with the power of the Right of Withdrawal.** Further, it should include representatives from outside local government. For example, in Cumbria this could be such bodies as Cumbria Tourism, the Lake District National Park Authority, The National Trust, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Friends of the Lake District. If such a body decided to continue involvement in the process, supported by public referendum in the county, then this could be regarded as being the result of voluntarism and democracy.

The proposals for giving geological information to interested parties are not easy to understand. Clearly geology is in the last analysis all-important. It is, however, hard to see the point of giving information about 'basic geology' as an aid to decision-making on involvement in the process when what matters is the geology at 200m-1000m depth along with its hydrogeology and its hydrogeochemistry which require "years of detailed study". It seems that if the only areas that volunteer for involvement turn out to have no suitable geology, then a large amount of money is going to have been spent only for the process to have to start all over again.

In fairness to potential volunteers the government should point out that the construction of a GDF is essentially an act of faith. Some experts do believe this is a solution to long-term storage requirements, though the practice is not universal. However, the crucial test of the validity of this belief - the test of time - will not be passed (or failed) for the "hundreds of thousands of years" mentioned in the consultation paper. We say this because of the repeated statement that the aim of the GDF is that no "harmful" radioactivity should reach the surface. Why the qualifying adjective?

The proverbial man from Mars looking at the consultation proposals could well form the view that they are tailor-made to anticipate a probable outcome - that Allerdale and Copeland councils will volunteer as potential hosts, following which the process will grind on to deliver in due course the desired GDF. There were, after all, no other volunteers for the previous MRWS process.

If this happened the process would be reminiscent of that in which some governments had repeated referendums on EU-related issues till they got the result they wanted. If this happened in Cumbria it would be a rejection of a thorough and democratic process and of a democratic decision already taken. In the Westmorland Gazette of 14 February 2013 Baroness Verma was reported as ruling out the siting of a GDF in West Cumbria, confirming that **the county was no longer an option and that an alternative UK site was being sought.** The honourable thing, therefore, would be to exclude Cumbria from the new process.

OTHER COMMENTS

To argue that the new proposals represent a new process and that, therefore, commitments given no longer apply, would be totally specious. The fact that this is not truly a new process is confirmed by one absolutely fundamental principle common to both the MRWS process and the "new" process - the principle that voluntarism is ultimately not an inviolable requirement of the process. In the MRWS consultation paper it was stated on page 93 and repeated verbatim on page 94: "In the event of the partnership

concluding that the omission of a potential host community from the PSA would create insurmountable problems for the siting process, then it could recommend the inclusion of the community concerned if this was supported by a full justification and explanation." The same notion is expressed in the current consultation paper in para 1.37 on page 15: "...in the event that at some point in the future, voluntarism and partnership does not look likely to work, the UK government reserves the right to explore other approaches".

In this context it is hard to understand why the government doesn't commit to doing the necessary geological investigations, identify possible sites, then perhaps see if any of the potential areas want to have the GDF. In the event that this were not so, then the government could simply go ahead on the basis of its fallback position. The order of procedure for the proposed "new" process does seem still to put the cart before the horse.

Yours faithfully,

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