

Long Term Management of the UK's Separated Civil Plutonium Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) Workshop, 21 May 2009

SUMMARY REPORT

1. Background

In January 2009 the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) published a paper, which set out the options for dealing with the UK's accumulated separated civil plutonium stocks. The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) is considering these options with a view to informing a decision on the future management of the plutonium. DECC convened a workshop of interested parties on 21 May 2009, in order to hear the views of key stakeholders at an early stage, to assist the department in its consideration of these options and enable the Government to take a view on how best to take this issue forward.

The Government considers that the need to start making decisions on the long-term management the UK's plutonium is informed by (worldwide) security and proliferation concerns. The UK wishes to take the lead in demonstrating responsibility for the security of fissile material.

The workshop was designed and facilitated on behalf of DECC by an independent team from The Environment Council, which has particular expertise in facilitating stakeholder engagement events. This summary, produced by The Environment Council, forms a meeting record of the workshop. A transcript report containing a more detailed account of the meeting is also available and can be found at www.the-environment-council.org.uk

2. Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the workshop were set out to participants as follows:

Aim:

- Explore with stakeholders the options for the long-term management of UK's civil separated plutonium.

Objectives:

- To understand the views of stakeholders on how the UK should manage its plutonium accumulation and to use these views to inform a consultation process that will set out and seek views on the UK's initial plans for long term plutonium management.
- To give stakeholders assurance that their views have been taken into account and that DECC will consider them.

3. Working Agreements

The meeting was conducted under the working agreement of non-attribution regarding the meeting record (unless there is a specific request by the person who made the comment to have it attributed), though the potential for attribution was acknowledged, with regard to individual's discussions of the workshop's deliberations, after the event.

Points were raised both with regard to the benefits of accountability associated with a working agreement of attribution and the benefits of an open exchange of views associated with an agreement of non-attribution.

4. Introduction by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)

Mark Higson of DECC's Office for Nuclear Development (OND) provided an introduction, which outlined the background and the purpose of the workshop. DECC affirmed that the department wished to hear the views of participants on what the Government's plutonium management strategy should be; and, what the process for taking the issue forward should be. DECC also emphasised that it was at the workshop primarily to listen.

5. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's (NDA) Credible Options

Paul Gilchrist of the NDA provided an overview of the work that it had undertaken to identify credible options for plutonium management. These credible options provided a context for the decision-making process and background information for the workshop discussions.

The NDA outlined that its options identification process had built on previous national and international work and had involved the engagement of stakeholders at different stages.

The options were set out by the NDA at high level as: store, dispose and recycle. The NDA advised that all options were technically credible. Furthermore, it was difficult to discriminate between options because of large uncertainties associated with each of them and because factors of policy for each of the options, for example, proliferation resistance, still needed to be assessed.

The NDA outlined that the Authority was to fill technical gaps in the knowledge base to aid decision-making and that future work would not be progressed until Government provided clarification on further work necessary.

Participants had the opportunity to ask questions of clarification following the presentation.

6. Relevant Factors to Assess Options

A discussion session followed to provide DECC with an opportunity to gain an understanding of what stakeholders considered to be the relevant factors that should be used to assess the options and for what reasons.

An introduction by Dean Gallacher of DECC offered some examples of relevant factors that could be used to assess options as a starting point for the discussion. The meeting participants were asked by the meeting facilitators to consider what, if anything, they thought was missing from the DECC draft list of examples; and, to give their views on which factors were most important to them and why.

Participants were asked by the meeting facilitators to firstly identify missing factors and highlight those of most significance. This included the following summary of points. It should be noted that these points represent a range of views rather than a consensus from the participants.

- The extent to which options presented an engineering challenge. This was not simply a matter of technical maturity and could not be guaranteed by previous success. The engineering needed to be properly understood and developed.
- Safety, including that of the public and of workers was a key factor against which everything else should be measured.
- How the option fitted with the solution for a geological waste repository should be taken into account.
- Community acceptance of the option is a relevant factor.
- How the options fitted within the international context: the approaches of other states to the issue and the view of other states on that of the UK.
- The impact of the option on policy: a holistic overview should be taken of the wider nuclear scene in the UK.

Participants were asked by the meeting facilitators to identify and highlight factors of particular importance. These are included in the following summary of points. It should be noted that these points represent a range of views rather than a consensus from the participants:

- Humility: Plutonium was developed as nuclear bomb material and has a much longer lifespan than the current safeguards arrangements.
- There needs to be clarity about whether there are any constraints on the assessment process from policy: How it affects the outcome and whether it is sensible.
- Assumptions as to how the issue is being approached need to be tested as the situation moves forward, to determine whether they are still sound. For example, assumptions should be tested as policy develops in other areas that might impact, such as mixed oxide fuel burning.
- Chemicals built up through burning mixed oxide fuel are much more dangerous in terms of any unforeseen release and in terms of dealing with the waste.
- Work on the disposal of plutonium is still proceeding, but there is a gap in information currently.
- Timescales need to be monitored as these can change as policy develops.
- Material is stored at more than one particular site and consideration needs to be given more widely than just to Sellafield, e.g. Dounreay.
- Cost-effectiveness changes with the timeline, for example, plutonium is expensive to run in reactors now, but the economics of this will change long-term.
- There are other high level waste facilities that need attention and money with regard to prioritising the hazards needing attention and we should therefore not focus solely on plutonium management.
- This is a national issue and should be owned by national groups as well as the local communities.
- The issue does not have public visibility and we need to consider whether it should have greater public notice: although the matter is of concern to future generations they have no awareness of it.
- The plutonium macro-economic document does a disservice to the debate on this matter; it is misleading and needs addressing.

7. Views on Options

A session was undertaken with the purpose of getting a sense of any views that participants had on options, and to understand why these were held. The session was introduced by DECC who reflected on the main options feasible for future management as set out by the NDA's investigations.

DECC also reaffirmed that the department had convened the workshop to listen to stakeholders' views and would welcome a better understanding of these.

The participants were then asked by the meeting facilitator to share, if they felt they could do so, what they considered their preferred option to be and why. Many of the participants found this request difficult as they considered that there was insufficient information to make an assessment at that point. Some of the participants were able to offer views, and these covered the range of options.

Participants were asked by the meeting facilitators to highlight points of significance, relating to a view on the options. This included the following summary of points. It should be noted that these points present a range of views rather than a consensus from the participants:

- A lot more information is needed across the options in order to make a decision. The issue of whether all the options need to be brought to the same level of engineering detail in order to make a decision credible also needs to be considered.
- None of the options are favoured, however, further stakeholder input on how aspects of the options might develop would be welcomed.
- The NDA credible options paper does not convey the sense that it is rooted in the wealth of information on plutonium that already exists.
- Chemistry and the implications for risk assessment should be taken account of.
- Support exists in West Cumbria for the recycling option for use in situ, however there are potential community acceptance issues with other options if they involve West Cumbria.
- It should be noted that there might be changes in local government that could throw national policy into disarray.
- Dialogue and trust are very important elements in the matter: In order for stakeholders to express a preference it is important for them to know how that preference will be used in the decision-making process.

8. Process Going Forward

A session was undertaken to seek views from stakeholders on how they thought the process for considering how to deal with the UK's accumulated separated civil plutonium stocks should go forward.

Matters raised during the subsequent discussion included the following summary of points. It should be noted that these points present a range of views rather than a consensus from the participants:

- The government could spend a lifetime looking at research before making a decision, or at the opposite end of the spectrum, take a decision on the basis incomplete information. A view on the status of the current situation in this regard is needed, to understand whether a point has been reached where there is a preliminary view and if not, how to get to that point.
- A consultation would be an opportunity, to set out the decision to be made and the process that could be used to involve stakeholders in making it, and to get feedback on that.
- A consultation on the process could also set out the further work to be done on aspects such as cost, environmental impacts, safety etc.

- A scoping exercise to capture all the factors/information needed to take the decision is needed. There is also a need to develop an information base on which the questions around the decisions can be formulated.
- There is a need to provide a separate engagement process for professionals and the public at large. There is a difference between the understanding of both groups and therefore a need to cater for the respective needs separately.
- Joined up stakeholder engagement although difficult to achieve is needed to achieve an understanding of the wider picture.
- There should be a round table on proliferation to get an understanding of impacts of policy and in order to help demonstrate that it has been properly considered.
- Information from the commercial sector should be encouraged to understand what their intentions are as this is currently an information gap.

The meeting facilitators also asked participants to consider the specific question of whether DECC should work up a preliminary view on an option to bring to a consultation, or whether the Government should go to consultation with an open array of options. The responses included the following summary of points:

- The range of participants at the workshop was too limited and greater consensus was required even at an early stage in the process. It was inappropriate to take sounding from the workshop on the particular question posed above. Further dialogue around the process should be undertaken.
- A preliminary option is not appropriate at the current stage. Whatever decision DECC takes is unlikely to satisfy everyone so further information should be gathered or developed in order to have a basis to make a decision and provide a rationale.

8. Evaluation

Participants' views on the day's workshop were collected via a questionnaire in order to understand whether the workshop had met participants' expectations and how effective the process was. The questions posed and a brief summary of the responses received is set out below.

How far did today's workshop meet your expectations?

Responses included the following points: Some disappointment was expressed around a lack of sufficient technical information on which to undertake an informed debate. There was an acknowledgement of the difficulties inherent in the workshop being a first step in the process. The workshop had been useful in helping to establish what the issues were.

How confident are you that your input today will influence DECC's decision making on plutonium management?

Responses included the following points: Some concern was expressed about political influence on the decision and uncertainty about how the process would move forward. Participants also expressed confidence that DECC were listening and engaging.

How far has today's workshop met its objectives?

Responses included the following points: Insufficient technical information on which to have a debate and uncertainty about the next stages were expressed as limitations. Participants also expressed the view that the workshop had been a useful undertaking.

How easy was it for you to participate today?

Responses included the following points: Some participants commented on the accessibility of the workshop's location to their own locality. Other participants considered that the structure and facilitation of the workshop had been enabling.

9. Close

To conclude the workshop, the meeting facilitators asked DECC to reflect on what the department had heard from participants during the day's discussions. This feedback included the following points, which have been summarised below.

- The workshop was very worthwhile and helped considerably with DECC's thinking.
- The invitation list for the workshop was not intended to capture everyone. It was intended to be a smaller event at which all participants would have a better opportunity to have dialogue and listen.
- Participants have highlighted the degree to which information needs to be further worked up and the importance of process. With regard to the latter the department will take away the point about the need to consult on the form of the consultation.
- The discussion on relevant factors has helped to flush out a number of important issues.
- There is evidently a tension and a balance that needs to be struck between working up information and then taking a decision, or taking a decision on imperfect information. There is also the challenge of knowing whether or not that point has been reached.

10. Appendix 1 – DECC'S responses to questions from Greenpeace

Attached is DECC's responses to questions from Greenpeace posed at the 21st May workshop.

11. Further Information

For further information on the issue of long-term management the UK's civil separated plutonium, please visit the OND pages of the BIS website at <http://www.berr.gov.uk/energy/sources/nuclear/index.html> or contact Dean Gallacher at Dean.Gallacher@decc.gsi.gov.uk

The Environment Council, 5 June 2009

www.the-environment-council.org.uk

Appendix 1: DECC's Responses to questions from Greenpeace

<u>Greenpeace question</u>	<u>DECC response</u>
How did DECC arrive at the invitee list for the meeting for 21st?	Those invited were drawn from organisations who had responded to earlier consultations and who we believed had an interest in the management of the UK's accumulated plutonium. The NDA were asked to review the list and say if there were any organisations that they believed we had missed.
Why were people from the NDA's two earlier meetings on its plutonium options paper (which included the NDA, regulators, industry people and individual specialists) not invited to the meeting?	The meeting was for DECC to have an opportunity to meet with those organisation who we believed had a key interest in the UK's accumulated plutonium. We purposely wanted to keep the number of attendees at a level where there was a real opportunity for us to engage with those stakeholders. Inviting everyone who had been to the NDA's meeting on plutonium would not have allowed us that opportunity.
Does DECC intend to call a separate meeting for those stakeholders not involved in/invited to the meeting on 21 st ?	We do not have any plans to call a separate meeting.
Will all earlier participants from NDA meetings be invited to future meetings?	We do not have any plans to call future meetings.
Why did DECC decide not to offer expenses to those attending the meeting?	Normal practice is for organisations to fund the expenses of those attending meetings on their behalf.
Why has it not set up a special budget from within OND's substantial funding to be able to fund stakeholder attendance at these meetings?	DECC does not have substantial funding from which we could set up a special budget.
Have any of those invited sought, or being offered, expenses to attend? Will appropriate funding be made available for all earlier participants to take part?	Of those initially invited only one participant asked if expenses would be paid. In our covering letter we asked those invited whether there were any organisations or individuals that they considered should be invited. One of those nominated individuals sought payment to attend and expenses.
Why exactly did DECC call this meeting now?	It was the right time for Government to act. The formulation of the NDA has driven the need to ensure that legacy issues are being dealt with. In addition the Prime Ministers gave a speech in which he said that "we will bring forward detailed plans for the responsible future management of our stocks of fissile material".

<u>Greenpeace question</u>	<u>DECC response</u>
How will the process be taken forward e.g. does DECC have a timetable for future meetings?	<p>We expect to go forward by consulting publicly on long term plutonium strategy. It is our intention not to reach a final decision at the end of this consultation but to continue on through a series of decision points over a period of time. The discussions we had on the 21 May have impacted on how we will plan take the process forward initially. We still have to progress plans for long term plutonium strategy but at the same time have to take on board what we heard from that meeting.</p> <p>Our thoughts now are on whether we seek wider views on some of the key issues that came out of the meeting before going to public consultation.</p>
Will this be done in conjunction with the NDA or separately?	The process is being taken forward by Government. The NDA are likely to be involved but the extent of their involvement will need to be determined as we go forward.
In informal discussions with the NDA last year, it was stated that there was interest in holding a roundtable with specialists and NGOs – and others – on the potential proliferation impacts of any Plutonium disposition options listed for further work. Does DECC intend to call such a roundtable?	We don't have any plans to hold such discussions
Will DECC be hiring specialists independent of the industry to comment on any papers it publishes on this matter?	We do not have plans to hire specialists.