The Rt Hon Chris Huhne MP
Secretary of State
Department of Energy
and Climate Change

Dr M W Weightman
HM Chief Inspector
Nuclear Directorate
Health & Safety Executive
Redgrave Court
Merton Road
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Dear Mike,

JAPANESE EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UK NUCLEAR INDUSTRY

I would like to thank you and your team for the important work that you have undertaken in preparing your interim report on the implications of the Fukushima accident for the UK nuclear industry.

I welcome the findings and recommendations of the report. I particularly note your conclusion that you see no reason, in considering the direct causes of the Fukushima accident, for curtailing the operation of nuclear power plants or other nuclear facilities in the UK.

Having considered your findings, I see no reason why the UK should not proceed with our current policy: that nuclear should be part of the future energy mix, as it is today, providing that there is no public subsidy. I set out below, in more detail, the Government's plans to take forward work in the areas where you have identified actions of direct relevance to us, namely recommendations 1 to 3.

Safety is, and will continue to be, our number one priority and I believe it is vitally important that Government, Regulators and Industry continue to work together in implementing the recommendations you have made and ensuring an ongoing commitment to the principle of continuous improvement in nuclear safety.

I look forward to receiving your final report in the autumn.

Recommendation 1:

The government should approach IAEA, in co-operation with others, to ensure that improved arrangements are in place for the dissemination of timely authoritative information relevant to a nuclear event anywhere in the world.

Planned Action

The Government will continue to work with its partners in the G8, G20 and other international fora to ensure better compliance with international conventions and push forward work on enhancing nuclear safety standards established under the auspices of the IAEA.

In conjunction with our partners we have called upon the IAEA to consider the relevant standards to identify issues that may warrant examination and revision in the light of the Fukushima accident.

We are also committed to working with our international partners to consider how the dissemination of information under the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident can be further improved in terms of both efficiency and substance.

Domestically, the Government has formed a technical coordination group to consider how the results of national radiation monitoring are collated across the relevant departments and agencies and communicated to the public – with the aim of making this as clear and informative as possible.

Recommendation 2:

The Govt should consider carrying out a review of the Japanese response to the emergency to identify any lessons for UK public contingency planning for widespread emergencies, taking account of any social, cultural and organisational differences.

Planned Action

The Government will carry out a review of the Japanese response to the Fukushima emergency. The review will build on the UK's existing robust and well-exercised plans for civil contingencies (including nuclear emergencies), and will be strongly informed by relevant findings presented by Dr Weightman to the IAEA following the recent international fact-finding mission to Japan.

The UK's planning for civil contingencies already takes into consideration key groups of people (e.g. vulnerable people, victims and responder personnel) and, in the case of civil nuclear emergency planning includes regular exercises involving the site operator, local authority, central government and others. Building on these existing arrangements and in line with the Weightman report the review will also take into account social, cultural and organisational factors. In doing this we will take the opportunity to consult with our embassies worldwide, to take into consideration broad-ranging cultural aspects of people's behaviour during emergencies.

Also in line with the Weightman report the review will include a strong focus on ensuring that the UK's evacuation plans for a wide range of civil contingencies, including nuclear emergencies, are robust, practical and appropriate to the UK context. We will complete the review before the end of the year.

Recommendation 3:

The Nuclear Emergency Planning Liaison Group (NEPLG) should instigate a review of the UK's national nuclear emergency arrangements in light of the experience of dealing with the prolonged Japanese event.

Planned Action

NEPLG will review the capacity and capability of the UK's nuclear emergency response arrangements to effectively manage a prolonged nuclear emergency, caused by a UK or overseas incident.

The Interim Report asked for a particular focus on the national capacity and capability for sustained widespread environmental monitoring, and the co-ordination of resources for radiation monitoring. The review will consider monitoring arrangements for both the acute phase and longer term recovery phase.

The review will evaluate how existing UK nuclear emergency response arrangements and monitoring capability would stand up to a prolonged incident in the UK. It will look closely at what happened in Japan in terms of decisions taken to protect the public and compare the UK approach to the one used in Japan. It will consider in some detail the response required for faults considered to be reasonably foreseeable and will additionally consider the response required for 'beyond design basis' accidents. It will then make recommendations which will inform Dr Weightman's final report to be published later this year. The recommendations will also be used to update NEPLG's published guidance on dealing with nuclear emergencies, national and international.

During the Fukushima Crisis, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) was closely involved in coordinating advice to the UK Government on the safety of British citizens in Japan. This demonstrates the importance the Government places on the use of science in responding to emergencies and this approach will continue for any future crises. Work continues to ensure that the role of science in decision-making during emergencies (including nuclear), is further strengthened. The review will incorporate results from this work.

CHRIS HUHNE