

Independent Review Panel review of RWM's draft national screening guidance

The Independent Review Panel was set up by the Geological Society in response to the Government White Paper 2014. Its remit was

(i) to review and evaluate the draft national screening guidance. The UK Government has asked the Geological Society to be responsible for overseeing the establishment of this independent review panel, having access to a broad range of well-respected national and international geoscience expertise and other learned bodies.

(ii) to assess whether the national geological screening guidance developed is technically robust, whether it can be implemented using the existing geological information available, and whether it provides an appropriate assessment of the prospects for developing a robust long-term safety case in a range of geological settings to accommodate the UK inventory of higher activity waste. This assessment should be achieved through open discussion and engagement with the developer, the public and interested stakeholders.

The panel met on five occasions in 2015 and 2016, usually with colleagues from RWM and more recently with the colleagues from the BGS, including one meeting held in public, recorded for broadcast on the internet in advance of RWM's public consultation on the guidance, and one meeting at the BGS offices in Keyworth to see and ask questions about the extent of information available, including access to the UK3D models.

We have commented on several drafts of the National Geological Screening Guidance, and on a draft of the Detailed Technical Instructions and Protocols prepared for the BGS. There has been much discussion of topics that include confidence in geological information and the handling of uncertainty, the nature of geological data, the identification of suitable rock types, the recognition of aquifers and of low permeability lithostratigraphic units, and the location of structures that might influence the siting of a radioactive waste repository.

We support the approach of developing a high level description of the geology of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, subdivided into 13 regions, which will be the basis for identifying areas worthy of more detailed study. The present guidance is sound technically and it can be applied at a high level using existing and appropriate geological information; it therefore provides a basis for assessing the prospects for a GDF safety case in the relevant geological settings. There is increasing agreement on the kinds of data that are presently available and how they might be best presented. The challenges are in improved communication, and in the quality and accessibility of the regional reports to be produced by RWM.

Chris Hawkesworth on behalf of the panel members, March 2016