

“PAWB” RESPONSE TO THE DECC CONSULTATION ON A BURIAL SITE FOR NUCLEAR WASTE

18/12/2013

Preface

PAWB (*PAWB is the Welsh word for “everyone” -Translator*) (*Pobl Atal Wylfa B* = People Against Wylfa B) opposes building more nuclear power stations because of the technological dangers, effect on the environment, effect on Welsh culture, the cost of the technology and of course concerns about nuclear waste.

We think that the current consultation is unacceptable for the following reasons:-

1. There is too much centralisation in the management process for burying nuclear waste and we think that local consultations in Cumbria are transparent. The Government has changed the terms of the process by changing the layer of local government which is entitled to discuss further. We think this has happened because Cumbria Council has repudiated the idea of burying nuclear waste.
2. We think the Government wants to try and force the burial of nuclear waste on Cumbria despite local opposition. For example, Michael Fallon, the Business Minister is reported as follows in the “I” newspaper on 11/12/2013 -

“The Business minister Michael Fallon has given the strongest indication yet that the Government will block elected officials who vetoed a £12bn nuclear waste dump from being able to do so again. Mr Fallon said his “instinct” was that county councillors should not be allowed to decide whether or not toxic nuclear waste should be buried in Cumbria. Appearing before a House of Lords Committee yesterday, Mr Fallon also hinted that the Government may impose a nuclear dump on a site it deems suitable”.

3. In our opinion, the process of burying nuclear waste should not be considered. We think it would be much better to find an answer which would examine how the waste could be detoxified before being disposed of finally.
4. We think there is a need to answer the problem of disposing of the waste which already exists before even considering generating more waste in new nuclear power stations. The Government’s power-station building programme is based on the assumption of generating 16GW of electricity. The waste from these nuclear power stations will be three times hotter than current waste. PAWB recently (12/12/2013) found out with horror that DECC is considering building yet more nuclear power stations in order to generate 75GW of electricity. This would mean up to 50 new reactors. In PAWB’s view, this is totally irresponsible and endangers the future of the entire British population, as well as people living in other countries. Why was that information not made available? Who in DECC is responsible for this – full-time civil servants or people seconded from the energy industry?

5. We have absolutely no confidence in the ability of the Government to deal with the existing waste and therefore no faith in the current consultation. We would like to remind you of the mess at Sellafield, where the cost to the taxpayer of cleaning the site is over £70bn. We fear that the costs of burying nuclear waste will be a financial burden on future generations and we do not believe that the nuclear industry can shoulder the burden to the appropriate degree – that is 100% of the cost.
6. We think that the idea of offering a financial incentive to communities in order to persuade them to accept the burial of nuclear waste is odious. We think that this type of operation seeks to take advantage of a region which is already weak economically. We believe other methods should be used to renew and create employment in areas like this. We assume that an incentive of this type is not likely to work in areas of Britain where the geology is more appropriate for a burial site than Cumbria, but those districts are more economically prosperous, for example, Eastern England.

Specific questions in the consultation.

Question 1- Do you agree that a test of public support should be taken before the representative authority loses the Right of Withdrawal? If so, what do you think would be the most appropriate means of testing public support, and when should it take place? If you do not agree with the need for such a test, please explain why.

We think the only way to find out the level of support or lack of support for burying nuclear waste in a district is to hold a referendum. Before that is done, the local population should have detailed information on the entire process. That information should be provided impartially, not by a body which would be responsible for the work but by an external impartial body.

Question 2 - Do you agree with the proposed amendments to decision making within the MRWS siting process? If not, how would you modify the proposed phased approach, or, alternatively, what different approach would you propose? Please explain your reasoning.

We do not believe there has been a Britain-wide discussion. Moreover, we believe that the discussion should be expanded to cover how to deal with the waste. Burial is only one option. Again, as in our response to question 1, an impartial body should present the facts to the public.

Question 3 - Do you agree with this approach to revising roles in the siting process set out in the White Paper? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

We do not believe that the Government is impartial in the whole process. We think that other ways of keeping waste in a safe way temporarily should be considered until a solution to the problem of waste has been found. That is the situation in Scotland. Burial is just one option. As has already been said, we do not think that any more nuclear waste should be generated before this problem has been solved.

Question 4 - Do you agree with this proposed approach to assessing geological suitability as part of the MRWS siting process? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

We do not believe that the Government wants to look beyond Cumbria as a site for burying nuclear waste. It is well-known that the geology is more suitable in other areas but the Government does not want to disregard districts such as Cumbria where there are more difficult technical and probably more expensive problems. We note that Nirex listed 537 possible burial sites 1988, but the Sellafield site was not one of them.

Question 5 - Do you agree with this proposed approach to planning for the geological disposal facility? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

PAWB has absolutely no faith in the proposed planning process. We think any local discussions up to now have been misleading. Mr Fallon's comments already referred to demonstrate how oblivious the Government is of local feelings. We think the centralised system of requiring the Government to decide whether large projects are of benefit to the state and hence to disregard local needs and concerns, is erroneous and anti-democratic.

Question 6 - Do you agree with this clarification of the inventory for geological disposal – and how this will be communicated with the volunteer host community? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

We think it is impossible to give a detailed estimate of the waste which could be buried in a nuclear waste burial site. As already referred to, we understand that DECC is considering an enormous programme of nuclear developments which could mean up to 50 new reactors. As far as we know, it would be very difficult to plan for something which could happen but this is by no means certain. Moreover and re-iterating our core standpoint, we believe it is irresponsible to generate more nuclear waste before the problem of dealing with the existing waste has been solved.

Question 7 - Do you endorse the proposed approach on community benefits associated with a GDF? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

PAWB totally opposes the idea of offering a financial incentive to a district in exchange for an agreement to accept a nuclear waste burial site. We think it is putting pressure on poor communities, when radical answers to economic problems should be created in areas like this. We think the scientific arguments are likely to be disregarded by people with their eyes on the money.

Question 8 - Do you agree with the proposed approach to addressing potential socio-economic and environmental effects that might come from hosting a GDF? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

PAWB believes this is another way of paying poor communities to accept a nuclear waste burial site, so we totally oppose it.

Question 9 - Do you have any other comments?

PAWB believes that ways of dealing with nuclear waste other than creating burial sites should be looked at. This is fundamentally important, particularly if there are no communities willing to accept nuclear waste voluntarily. We believe it is totally unacceptable for the Government to insist on burying nuclear waste Cumbria despite local opposition.

Conclusions

1. We think this consultation is just a cosmetic exercise.
2. We believe that establishing a burial site to deal with nuclear waste is only one of the possible answers.
3. We think that no more nuclear waste should be generated in Britain until a definitive and safe answer has been found to the problem of the waste which exists already.
4. We think it is odious to offer a financial incentive to communities to accept a nuclear waste burial site.
5. We believe that local communities should be able to decide by referendum whether or not they should accept a nuclear waste burial site, based on unbiased scientific information provided by bodies not involved in creating the burial site themselves.
6. We believe that nuclear energy is too dangerous and too expensive to be used and sustainable methods of generating energy should be used. These methods exist already, are environmentally safe, create jobs, reduce in cost annually because of developments in technology and can meet the UK's energy needs if appropriate investment is made.