# minutes of Committee on Radioactive Waste Managament (CoRWM) plenary

# 2 July 2014, Thurso

#### Secretariat

Present: (CoRWM): Laurence Williams (Chair), Francis Livens, Brian Clark, John Rennilson, Helen Peters, Stephen Newson, Simon Harley, Paul Davis, Lynda Warren, Gregg Butler, Laura Butchins (secretariat).

Apologies: Rebecca Lunn, Janet Wilson

1. The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public who were observing the meeting.

***Declarations of Interest***

1. There were no declarations of interest.

***Chair’s Update***

*Nuclear Innovation Research Advisory Board (NIRAB)*

1. The Chair had recently provided the Nuclear Innovation Research Advisory Board (NIRAB) with CoRWM’s views on future Research and Development activities relating to radioactive waste. The areas proposed were as follows:
   * advanced fuel cycles which may reduce the burden on geological disposal, for example if fission products could be separated according to their half lives,
   * processes that ‘consume’ minor actinides which would reduce the burden on a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF),
   * waste streams that arise from advanced fuel cycle options and their implications for storage and eventual disposal, and
   * implications for radioactive waste (including storage and disposal) of advanced reactor systems
2. Specific to GDF CoRWM proposed the following to fill gaps in R&D:
   * presentation of 3-D images / geological information to the public to enable a better understanding of the issues and improved visualisation of what a GDF may look like;
   * approaches to measuring / estimating and then conveying uncertainty, especially for sparse and diverse data sets that include observational and anecdotal data types;
   * chemical disturbed zones around underground excavations and their temporal evolution / interactions with ground waters (a special aspect of THMC);
   * RWM getting fully up to speed with mudrock research issues;
   * underground stress sensing in multicomponent systems; and
   * review the work being done internationally, for example on mud rocks in France.
3. A member asked the Chair if he thought those knowledgeable about waste R&D had adequate representation on the NIRAB. The Chair responded that he thought the key areas were adequately covered on the Board itself and its sub-committees. It was agreed that it would be important to look at the whole life cycle of new reactor systems including dealing with the waste streams.

*Westminster Energy, Environment & Transport Forum Keynote Seminar: Nuclear energy in the UK*

1. The Chair gave a presentation at this seminar on 20th May 2014 in which he explained CoRWM’s views on key issues surrounding radioactive waste. He also talked through the issues associated with siting of a Geological Disposal Facility. The key messages given were the need to focus on the safety case and not the geology and the need to look at safety, security and non-proliferation issues in addition to environmental effects.

*Submission of CoRWM’s annual report*

1. CoRWM’s 2013-14 annual report was sent to sponsor ministers on Friday 28th June 2014. Both the covering letter and Chair’s foreword had highlighted the considerable amount of work that the Committee had done. The Chair reflected that the report covers the key issues discussed by the Committee over the last 12 months. He thought that when Ministers read it, they should get a clear view of the advice and contribution that the Committee had made during the past year especially in relation to the advice given to DECC at various stages of its review of siting process.
2. Members agreed that the report should be published in the week commencing 14th July 2014, letting sponsoring departments know when it was done.

***Members Updates***

*Nuclear Issues Group Quarterly meeting*

1. Since the last plenary meeting, a member of CoRWM had given a presentation at the Nuclear Issues Group at Worcester College, Oxford. The event had attracted a small but lively attendance and there had been many questions.
2. A member of CoRWM had put in a proposal to speak about decommissioning at a World Nuclear Association event in September however there had not been enough interest in the topic to arrange a session.

*Radioactive Waste Management Limited (RWM), Technical Advisory Panel (TAP)*

1. A member of CoRWM had observed a meeting of the RWM’s Technical Advisory Panel which was set up to provide advice and challenge to RWM’s R&D programme and its interfaces with its other work. The panel is chaired by Neil Chapman and has representation from other countries which have GDF programmes in addition to others.
2. At the meeting an update was provided by DECC on progress made on the GDF siting process and updates from RWM about the activities that they had been involved in.
3. There had been discussion about RWM’s communication and engagement strategy that would follow the publication of a new siting process by Government. RWM were keen to make sure that their communications would be stakeholder focused and provide the information that people wanted, not just “selling” geological disposal. CoRWM agreed that RWM would have to send their best people to talk about the issues involved and the high level strategy to communities.
4. CoRWM discussed whether the TAP, a technical group should focus on engagement issues but it was agreed that because communication of science was a key risk on programme, that advice from TAP was relevant.
5. On business planning, TAP had challenged the way that it was presented and suggested that change control for the generic safety case be overseen by the disposal system development committee tasked.
6. TAP then reviewed the NDA’s Research Board’s review of the NDA’s R&D programme. TAP had previously provided input into the review and had identified two areas for further investigation, these being: chemotoxicity, which should be looked at alongside radiotoxicity, and the communication of science in relation to disposal.
7. TAP had advised that RWM should look at engaging prominent scientists and groups to help with the communication of science and uncertainty in complex issues. They also thought it would be worth looking at other areas where this is done, for example in communicating hazards from volcanic eruptions.
8. The use of mathematical models was discussed and TAP asked RWM to seek external review of its process controls for the models that they used.
9. TAP had looked at the criticality report and questioned the definition and what was needed for disposal.
10. Overall the member commented that TAP seemed to be working well providing challenge of and advice to RWM on their work.

*Nuclear Waste Research Forum (NWRF)*

1. A CoRWM member had recently observed a meeting of the Nuclear Waste Research Forum. The majority of nuclear waste producers and regulators had attended. The evening event had provided the opportunity to find out the views of attendees on an informal basis.
2. At the meeting, concerns had been raised over access to “old knowledge” and archives and the loss of skills / waste expertise. The need to inform the supply chain of timescales for waste arisings was also raised so that companies could plan accordingly.
3. In general the CoRWM member that had attended the meeting thought that the NWRF was a cooperative group and effective at sharing information and solutions to managing waste at different nuclear sites.
4. RWM had recently launched a new website which displayed the issues raised about geological disposal and how RWM were responding to them. NWRF had agreed that it was good to be transparent about the challenges raised now even if some of the challenges would only become relevant in the future. The CoRWM meeting attender had looked at RWM’s issues management website and thought it was detailed and clear but a minor point was that the introductory page kept coming up unnecessarily.

*Scottish Government Implementation Board*

1. The Scottish Government had circulated a further draft version of the Implementation Strategy at the end of May and CoRWM had provided comments at short notice. The version had some improvements although there were still some weaknesses and questions left unanswered. It was still unclear where the strategy added value to the waste management operations. CoRWM would wait to see when and if the strategy would be published in light of political uncertainty in Scotland at that time.

***Storage of Intermediate Level Waste at Dounreay***

1. CoRWM had visited the Dounreay site on the previous day. The Committee had received presentations on the site’s strategy to manage its Intermediate Level Waste and the plans for decommissioning the various facilities. The Committee visited the Dounreay Cementation Plant and associated ILW stores, and the Dounreay Fast Reactor, it was also given a tour of the rest of the site by minibus and a tour of the new Low Level Waste Facility.
2. In general the Committee commented on the clarity, enthusiasm and candidness of the facility managers at the facilities that were visited. The staff seemed highly committed to delivering the storage of ILW at the site.
3. CoRWM had some concerns that the site only had one cementation plant which was designed in 1980s and would need to be operational over the remaining period that the site would produce waste streams requiring cementation. The Committee agreed that they would look into why plans were cancelled for a new plant and what risks were posed if the current plant were to stop working.
4. The strategy for storing Intermediate Level (radioactive) Waste at the site was discussed. CoRWM felt that the use highly shielded packages in unshielded stores rather than unshielded containers in a shielded store required further investigation. CoRWM agreed to look at the benefits of shielded packaging versus shielded stores in its work programme.
5. CoRWM discussed the need for complete decommissioning of the facilities to remove all traces from the site, and in particular for the shaft. The Committee agreed that the waste in the shaft should be removed and the shaft decommissioned.
6. The Committee had learned that the Low Level Waste pits that were currently being used on the Dounreay site would be decommissioned and the waste sent to the new facility as preliminary analysis had shown that the case for safety in the long term could not be made for the current pits.
7. The visit highlighted the issue that the vast majority of ILW wastes at Dounreay (70% by volume and 99% of the radioactivity) would not be suitable for near surface disposal. The Committee agreed that CoRWM should raise this with Scottish sponsoring Ministers at the next opportunity.

**Action 1: Secretariat to arrange a meeting with the Scottish sponsoring Ministers when CoRWM next meets in Scotland.**

1. CoRWM observed that it had been shown a number of different designs and solutions for waste packaging across the site which may introduce complications for final disposal. The use of WAGR boxes may also cause handling problems if they were ever disposed of underground in limited space. The Committee agreed that the Letter of Compliance process by which RWM assess each package type for waste disposal is be crucial and the Committee agreed to look at the process for issuing the Letters of Compliance in their future work programme.
2. The Committee commented that the parent body structure and financial pressures may have impacts on how decisions are made about priorities for decommissioning as opposed to taking a risk based approach.
3. The Committee agreed to take some time in its work programme the following year to look at the robustness of interim storage across Scotland and rest of the UK.

**Action 2: The Committee agreed to write to both the NDA (who had facilitated the visit) and to Dounreay Site Restoration Limited to thank them for an excellent visit.**

***CoRWM’s Public Meeting in Thurso***

1. CoRWM had held a public meeting the previous evening for members of the public to meet the Committee, and raise any issues relating to radioactive waste.
2. The Committee thought that the meeting was worthwhile and helped Members gain a better understanding of the issues of interest to local people. It was also felt that at any future meetings it would be useful to briefly explain CoRWM’s role at the start and emphasise CoRWM’s independence.

**Action 3: CoRWM agreed that a note be sent to the local papers about CoRWM’s visit to Dounreay in addition to sending out an ebulletin and publishing a web article.**

***CoRWM Quarterly Progress Report***

1. Members of the Committee provided updates to the report and agreed to its publication subject to final clearance by email and informing of sponsoring departments.

***Responses to Cumbria Trust letters***

1. CoRWM had recently received two letters from members of the Cumbria Trust. The Committee noted the pertinent points raised. Members agreed that it would not be a good use of CoRWM’s limited time to respond to every point raised and to get into a long engagement with individual members of the public, which would only require the Committee to repeat its position.
2. CoRWM agreed that it would be helpful to produce a commonly asked question and answer section on CoRWM’s webpages.

***WIPP Leak Update***

1. A member of the Committee provided a short update on the public reports produced following the discovery of a release of radioactivity at the WIPP facility in New Mexico and the response from the media and others.

***Future Meeting Planning***

1. CoRWM agreed their proposed programme of visits and meetings until March 2015.
2. It was agreed that arrangements should be made to hire an interpreter for the Anglesey meetings and have materials and documents translated in advance of the meeting.

***AOB***

1. Members were reminded to submit their expense claims on time each month. The Committee were currently underspent and risked losing some of their allocated budget.
2. CoRWM noted that the current secretary Laura Butchins and the business manager Chanelle Gibson-McGowan were leaving at the end of July and the Chair Professor Williams thanked them for all their work to support the Committee.

***Question and Answer Session***

1. Members of the public who had observed the plenary meeting were asked if they had any questions or points to raise with the Committee.
2. A suggestion was made that the Committee could usefully visit those in the supply chain, such as those that produced the copper canisters and the steel used by the nuclear industry for storage. The Committee agreed that this would be a useful exercise and consider if it could be added into their work programme in future.
3. Another point raised was that Geological Disposal was on the critical path for successful delivery of new build nuclear power, however this is never mentioned in publications about waste being kept at Sellafield.
4. A comment was made about the future energy liabilities in Scotland and the Committee agreed that they may need to discuss this after the referendum.

***Table of Outstanding Actions***

| **Action no.** | **Outstanding Actions** | **Progress** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***8November 2013 (Minutes CoRWM doc. 3139)*** | | |
| 11/2013/64 | Secretariat to investigate another way to provide the historical information without undue pressure on secretariat resource. | Open – ongoing archiving work |
| ***20 February 2014 (Minutes CoRWM doc. 3150)*** | | |
| 02/2014/073 | Secretariat to invite NGOs to meet with sub-group of CoRWM | Open |
| ***20 March 2014 (Minutes CoRWM doc. 3159)*** | | |
| 03/2014/076 | An ad-hoc sub-group of the Committee would put together some engagement material to explain CoRWM’s role and highlight issues of interest to the public and stakeholders. | Open |
| ***2 May 2014 (Minutes CoRWM doc. 3162)*** | | |
| 05/2014/077 | Welsh sub-group to draft and circulate CoRWM response to Welsh Government’s Call for Evidence | Completed |
| ***2 July 2014 (Minutes CoRWM doc. 31XX)*** | | |
| 07/2014/078 | Brian Clark to produce questions for Q&A section on CoRWM’s website and send to other members. | Open |