

Review of the Siting Process for a Geological Disposal Facility September 2013

DSG Response to DECC's Consultation

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Questions raised

5.1 The aim of the siting process for a GDF is to implement a safe and practicable solution for higher activity radioactive waste that is deliverable and inspires public confidence. Before embarking on any revisions to the process set out in the White Paper, in pursuit of this aim, the UK Government wants to be satisfied that it has heard, and had the opportunity to consider, all views. Public engagement with this consultation and input on the questions asked is critical to the success of the siting process – your views are important. Specific questions on which Government is seeking views are to be found within the text itself, but they are reproduced here for ease of reference. You may comment on all or only some of the questions raised.

Consultation Questions

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.**
 - Yes, but there are many issues to consider, for instance:
 - The community making a decision to “support” the process is actually saying, “we agree to host the GDF if all the other criteria are met.” This will have to be made clear to the community members.
 - How will a community decision achieve continuity as members of the community will change over the decades involved in the new “focusing stage”
 - With an open ended timescale for “learning and focusing” how will the decision making at Government level cope with a number of communities tackling their community support programmes perhaps years apart?
 - The community support test needs to be taken before major public expenditure, but without considerable public expenditure an informed decision by community members would be unrealistic.
 - Test should be by secret ballot with a minimum turnout criterion and a major

differential criterion.

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.**
 - The new process is not dissimilar from the original White Paper staged process but without specific clarity of objectives. It could be more difficult for lay individuals to understand where the process is up to without specific stages and milestones.
 - Without stages and milestones it will be more awkward to compare where different volunteering communities are in the process.
 - No mention is made of the actual landowners who might have the land which is suitable for the surface facilities. During the “Focussing” stage this land might change hands by inheritance, sale (perhaps speculation) or compulsory purchase. The existing and/or new owners might have different views from the community.

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?**
 - Agree that the Government needs to take a more leading and visible position in the relaunch of the initiative and does not drop out thereafter. Continuity in staffing in the Government departments concerned is crucial in a project of this type.
 - NDA could take the project through the regulatory and permitting stages but unless it is radically restructured it has not the capability to engineer and operate the GDF. A major national/international engineering company is required which RWMD could perhaps be absorbed into.
 - NDA has a problem driving a GDF solution for HAW in Scotland! (para 2.72)
 - A definite policy for engaging with NGOs needs to be established to ensure the derailing that occurred in the Cumbria MRWS process does not re-occur. NGOs can provide legitimate challenge but are not responsible for the use of tax payers money or achieving national goals so their place is limited and all players need to understand where they fit in the revised process.
 - CoRWM’s terms of reference should be extended to provide wider advice to a range of bodies.

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?**
 - This approach obviously reflects the problems encountered in the Cumbria MRWS process and should put more appropriate information in lay people’s hands earlier.
 - The problem remains the same as in Cumbria though in that eminent

geologists representing different groups will have different views on all the scientific data and interpretation. A strategy of how to deal with this must be put in place at the outset of the “Learning” stage or else the same antagonistic dialogue will develop. This is where the Government and a better organization in RWMD need to have a firm policy and keep a tight grip on proceedings over a long timescale. It will be a very political and personality based period.

- There would be an increased prospect of success in achieving a GDF if land owned by the Government with a reasonable prospect for suitable geology was investigated in parallel with the volunteering process. To this end it is perhaps strange that NDA is in the process of selling off potentially suitable land.

5. Do you agree with this proposed approach to planning for a GDF? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

- While it is clearly sensible to treat the GDF as a Nationally significant project there does seem to be a potential disenfranchisement occurring at the regional level. Much emphasis is being put on the process occurring at the district level but then all the substantive regulatory and legal jumps up to national level with apparently little input from County level or the ability for the volunteering community to engage locally. There could be the inference that a volunteer will only be found a local level but once that has been achieved the process will quickly become “national” and the volunteer community left emasculated. A policy and plan to deal with this impression must be developed.
- There is no mention of the planning issues associated with the possibility of the surface facilities being many miles laterally from the underground facilities. Which communities have to demonstrate support?
- Is the community support process and result at District level somewhat fragile if in the end the County level input to the National Planning process can inhibit/halt the GDF development? The fact that the County is represented on the Consultative Partnership does not guarantee that the individual councillors (from other districts) will support a planning application.

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?

- The clarification and comprehensive listing is to be welcomed. However it would be prudent to at least design the GDF to accommodate the ILW at present stored in Scotland. The Scottish HAW Policy has no policy or method of dealing with the c70% of ILW at Dounreay which constitutes 40% of the radioactivity in HAW in Scotland. This position is untenable in the longer term whatever politicians might think.
- The UK Government, Scottish Government and NDA need a single sensible HAW policy leading to a clear GDF inventory.
- Scottish tax payers are funding the NDA and therefore RWMD despite

getting no return on GDF work.

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

- The question has to be asked about the “return of funds” to the Government if the GDF does not proceed. As these funds could have been paid to the community over decades, and used, would the community have to sell the assets they had acquired from the funds e.g. village halls?
- Any discussions and agreements between Government and communities must have some form of legal backing or else there would be no surety that the Treasury would honour another Government Department’s commitment.
- The area in which the benefits stretch should be defined. To not do so would create ambiguity, local disputes and acrimony.

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?

- As the early studies and reports are very general there is advantage in providing them early and easily done so.
- Among all the topics covered by this heading the crucial ones should be identified by Government/NDA and discussed with the potential communities to put things into context. The geology, hydrogeology, performance assessments, management of undertakings and spoils etc. are significantly more important to safety and wellbeing than some habitats/species and visual issues.
- Transport issues need special attention as the number of movements will be incessant over decades and will pass through all communities on the route to the GDF including those who have go no community benefit.