

BEIS Consultation on regulation of nuclear sites in the final stages of Decommissioning and clean-up

The Dounreay Stakeholder Group (DSG) is represented by over 20 organisations and therefore this response is one that is generally agreed by most organisations. However, there are some organisations, who may not agree entirely with this submission and therefore these organisations have been encouraged to provide their own response.

The government are seeking to change the legislation relating to the regulation of nuclear sites in the final phases of decommissioning.

Currently, NIA65 provides the legal framework for nuclear safety and nuclear third party liability. The Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) requires a site operator to have a licence to use a site for specified activities.

Discussions at the OECD decided that sites in the process of being decommissioned may be excluded from the international nuclear liability regime, when the main nuclear hazards have been removed and the risks to the public are small.

Nuclear sites like Dounreay are subject to regulation by ONR and SEPA. The environment agencies are responsible for regulating radioactive waste disposal and other aspects of environmental protection but SEPA and ONR differ in their approach to site clean-up and re-use.

At some point in the decommissioning programme, nuclear hazards will fall below the risk level needed for nuclear third party liability.

The proposal is for sites that meet this criteria to be able to relinquish their site licence, with the remaining (health and environmental) hazards regulated by HSE and SEPA. ONR would still be able to retain regulation of part of a site, e.g. High level wastes.

Dounreay is to an extent leading the field with its 'off-site' Low Level waste vaults, which are regulated by SEPA/HSE.

Dounreay Stakeholder Chairman have attended a consultation event in Edinburgh.

Consultation Proposals and Questions

1. Allow licensees to exit the licensing regime once the site has reached internationally agreed standards (the Paris Convention).

We agree. We would assume however that certain operations on the Dounreay site e.g. Higher Activity wastes Stores should continue to be regulated by ONR.

2. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and SEPA would regulate the remaining site (up to interim end state) in the same way that non-nuclear industrial sites undergoing clean-up for radioactive or other contamination are regulated.

We agree. We would wish to be consulted on the actual standards and criteria for de-licencing as it affects Dounreay and would assume that key hold points or milestones would be built into the NDA's decommissioning plans.

3. ONR to exclude certain disposal facilities for radioactive wastes from the nuclear licensed site.

We agree. Dounreay is to an extent already leading the field with its 'off-site' Low Level waste vaults, which are regulated by SEPA/HSE. This is subject to that assumption in our response to question 1, i.e. that High Activity Waste Stores, which at present will be on-site indefinitely and to be extended will continue to be regulated by ONR.

4. Any further evidence?

Dounreay has constructed off-site low level waste vaults as mentioned above. Most of the low-level waste is stored in half-height ISO containers with the materials grouted at high expense. The intention is for these vaults to be eventually grassed over.

One of these vaults is specifically for rubble and the consultation (from the 2016 discussion paper) talks about in-situ disposal of such wastes in voids or buried structures created by the decommissioning process. This raises the question of the discontinuation of this process; the re-use of such rubble and the possibility that the planned vault expansion (which has planning for up to six vaults) may not all be needed.

Dounreay will have extensive voids to fill:

-) The PFR vault
-) Intermediate Level Waste Silo
-) ILW Shaft
-) LLW liquid waste pit
-) High level liquid waste tank voids
-) On-site historic Low-level waste pits close to the coast which are to be re-excavated due to future costal erosion.

Dounreay also has a disused landfill site which continues to hold a waste management licence for a closed landfill and waste is no longer permitted to be deposited there.

We therefore have a ready-made solution which should not require export of rubble or importation of quarried material and the reduction in costs and corresponding CO2 reduction are welcome. However it may impact on the actual end state and future uses if there is surplus inert material which has to be 'mounded' on site and it is perceived as less than 'brownfield' condition.

Such re-use of materials may require a revisit of the decommissioning plans and changes to key dates and interim end-state. In particular, if the ILW Shaft and Silo were to be treated as 'landfill' and grouted/ backfilled with rubble, this would save a considerable cost from decommissioning and materially affect the interim end state date. This has a clear socio-economic impact on our area.

We would assume full consultation on these matters locally.

5. Any other comments?

No