

DOUNREAY STAKEHOLDER GROUP**CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT****Introduction**

When I took over the DSG Chair in March 2020, I could not have anticipated the sustained period of societal, economic and environmental change that would face communities in Caithness and North Sutherland.

The removal of the PBO model and the 'joining' of the Magnox and Dounreay businesses has understandably dominated the focus and bandwidth of the DSG, our members and secretariat support. These changes would represent a huge undertaking in any given year but the volume of announcements, policy changes, new/departing personnel and changes to governance was, at times, all consuming.

Despite these aforementioned themes getting the headlines; site safety, supply chain issues, recruitment and foreshore particles have all been given proper and robust discussion in both full meetings, our sub-groups and ad-hoc meetings held on behalf of the DSG. I would like to thank Davie Alexander and Gillian Coghill for their dedication in ensuring that all matters of interest to the DSG have been given the forums required to be deliberated in public.

It has at times been frustrating for the DSG to be seen as a reactive force, responding to external factors rather than working as a partner embedded in our community organisations. Whilst we all understand the extremely challenging environment we all operate in; clarity and honesty is valued above all else by our members.

To that end, it has been stressed that the impact of site decisions to our local, regional and national stakeholders can be far-reaching and that unintended consequences can be avoided with proper consultation and appropriate communication. We welcome the more regular meetings with senior members of the DSRL team, along with periodic meetings with the NDA and Dounreay/Magnox Chair Lawrie Haynes. These have proven very useful and informative.

Throughout the 2022/23 term, the DSG Business meeting have continued to meet fortnightly ensuring information flowed between the business meeting and members and I would like to thank members for their continued contribution in commenting on documents, taking part in meetings both physical and virtual, attending conferences and providing comment/views for various consultations. I would also like to thank those who have attended our business meetings at various times throughout the year to provide useful information to ensure DSG were kept fully informed.

Activities 2020-21

The DSG continued to play an active role and below provides a summary of these:

Meetings attended by DSG representatives

Whilst the pandemic necessitated the need for remote meetings for much of the last three years, it is important to note that a significant number of forums continue to adopt blended attendance. One such meeting, which we are pleased to have continued post-pandemic, is the Site Stakeholder Group Chair's Forum that meets quarterly. This forum provides interaction between the SSG Chairs and vice-chairs across the NDA estate, a useful opportunity to raise national issues with local contexts.

We also continued to take part in workshops and conferences and I must place on record our thanks to David Broughton, Gillian Coghill, Peter Faccenda, Roger Saxon and Trudy Morris who have attended various forums either directly or indirectly representing the Dounreay Stakeholder Group.

On behalf of the DSG, I have attended the Scottish Government Scottish Nuclear Sites meetings through the course of 22/23 providing a DSG update for regulators, observers and fellow SSG stakeholders.

An in-person meeting of the SSG Chairs Forum was hosted in Manchester in June, with senior NDA personnel hearing updates from across the nuclear estate. Whilst the opportunity to meet in person is always welcome, I do feel that meeting in nuclear communities would be more productive than meeting in metropolitan centres where there is little to no parallels with our own.

The NDA stakeholder summit was held in Edinburgh in September, with myself, Davie Alexander, Peter Faccenda and June Love attending. Whilst the summit was ultimately overshadowed by the sad death of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, it offered a welcome opportunity to voice the concerns of DSG stakeholders to senior NDA and government officials.

As mentioned previously, DSG business meetings have continued to meet fortnightly since the Covid-19 pandemic and we have used these opportunities to discuss both standing items and timeous developments that we feel require consideration.

- Representation at various other meetings continued including:
 - Caithness Transport Forum
 - The CNSRP Advisory Board, which has now become the Advisory Board for Focus North
 - Caithness Community Planning Partnership

Consultations

The DSG has been a regular respondent to consultations from local, devolved and national governments, regulators, site licence holders and the NDA as the responsible statutory authority for decommissioning the UK's legacy nuclear sites.

Whilst the DSG has contributed to a variety of consultations this year, I am conscious that we have become reliant on individual (member organisation) responses in recent months.

When the DSG can speak 'with one voice', I believe we are stronger and provide more authority to influence policy and decision makers. I know that consultations are an area that Members would like to see us to address and we must look at how we provide sufficient support and capacity to do so going forward.

Engagement between DSG/Japan

Having had the honour of visiting Japan a number of years ago, I was delighted to see visits returning. DSG business meeting members were invited to hear from Japanese students and their lecturers on the current issues with stakeholder engagement in Japan, a fascinating insight into how different our nuclear industry (and the responsibility to consult and engage) is to our fellow nuclear communities.

Changes to personnel

We have seen people within the Dounreay/Vulcan organisations come and go and I would like to place on record our thanks to all those who have contributed to DSG business over the year and extend good wishes to those who have moved on.

Of those who deserve a special mention, it would be remiss not to note our former Secretariat June Love. June left the DSG for a very well deserved retirement, late last year after a career associated with the Dounreay site. June was a force of nature and helped the DSG become the powerful voice it is today, we will dearly miss her effort, contribution and counsel. Happy retirement June!

Looking forward

The Magnox and Dounreay merger will continue to be monitored closely by the SSG, building upon our scrutiny role we undertook throughout the end of the PBO era. Whilst we welcome the commitment from David Peattie, CEO of the NDA, that funding will continue to be safeguarded and that Dounreay will maintain a strong identity, there continues to be concern about this local impact of the joining. We will work with DSRL, NDA, regulators and union officials to raise concerns and engage with this joining process as formally begins next month.

DSG patiently awaits the publishing of the Dounreay Lifetime Plan or 'route map' for decommissioning that will ascribe realistic targets against key hazards, projects and site remediation. This document is at the cornerstone of our lobbying power with devolved and central government, statutory agencies and programmes of national significance. It is vitally important that our community believes in the timeline for site decommissioning and that we can plan for any changes in workforce levels and the availability of contracts for our local supply chain.

Whilst the extension to limited operations at NRTE Vulcan has been welcomed locally, it does not detract from the very real work that needs to be done to assess decommissioning outcomes for the MOD site. The DSG will continue to seek the maximum local benefits through social value and lobbying all interested decommissioning parties to engage with socio-economics that has become standard practice in the civil nuclear industry.

Conclusion

At a recent meeting of stakeholders, I was reminded that our area is not looking for a hand-out or sympathy for our area's challenges. We instead, are looking for a hand-up and to be treated seriously as a region that can help deliver government priorities, whether those lie with Westminster or Holyrood. The establishment of a PSO for Wick to Edinburgh has been a highlight of cross-party and stakeholder led campaigning, where there is will and political necessity we can deliver for our region.

The reinvigorated partnership in the form of Focus North, which launched with a well attended conference earlier this year, is a unique vehicle for change that we must use and promote at every opportunity. Working together to deliver a vision for a post-Dounreay Far North is of the interest of everybody in the Far North of Scotland and also in the interests of those who rely on our tax take to fund core services from Edinburgh or Whitehall.

When I was elected to the Highland Council in May 2017, I made a promise that our nuclear community would have a strong voice and champion. At times it feels that national policy is working against the wishes of the Far North and that our voice is drowned out by the administrative capitals in Inverness, Edinburgh or London.

Although we could scale-back our focus, our remit and our efforts and adopt approaches like our sister SSGs where meetings are dominated by conditions of buildings, the hand-over of land for development, or socio-economics through 'good neighbour funding'.... we musn't down tools. It has never been more important than for this forum to speak with one voice.

Across Caithness and North Sutherland, businesses, workers and stakeholders are demanding certainty and stability in what continues to be a period of change. There is still work to be done on ensuring the continued oversight and scrutiny of the site operations alongside the opportunities for future employment for, not just today's workforce, but to ensure future employment opportunities for future generations to come.

The DSG will continue to do just that.



Provost Struan Mackie
DSG Chair
1 March 2023