

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

When I became Chair of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group in March of 2020, no member of this forum could have anticipated the sustained period of societal, economic and environmental change that would face communities in Caithness and North Sutherland. It is a topic that I have explored before, but I believe it remains the theme that dominates our work.

The 'joining' of the Magnox and Dounreay businesses to create NRS has understandably dominated much of the bandwidth of the DSG, our members and secretariat support. These changes alone would represent a huge undertaking in any given year but it has been only one such theme that has run through the DSG.

Safety has become a hot-button issue and one that has garnered significant press attention. Our Business Meeting and the Site Restoration Sub Group, led by Gillian Coghill have forensically engaged with the site, with regulators and of course you, our wider membership. We are rightly proud of our site, but safety above all other factors is paramount. The DSG will continue to apply pressure on the site to improve and demonstrate meaningful progress on safety issues.

The supply chain and the lack of pipeline for our local firms, continues to be an issue that is raised both inside the DSG forums and in the wider public domain. We continue to push for a change to the make-buy approach onsite, and hope that a robust lifetime plan will provide scope for business confidence. It is undeniable, regrettable and I believe avoidable that some much supply chain uncertainty, hardship and indeed job losses have happened due to the changes on site.

It would be remiss not to acknowledge the significant press coverage regarding the Dounreay Site in the last number of months. It is not for the DSG to take positions on industrial relations and meddle in what are complex labour matters. But I do believe, like the concerns regarding safety and supply chain, it is with regret that we have found ourselves in this position. There have been mistakes made, and it is now clear that relationships need to be better and trust must be rebuilt.

Despite these aforementioned themes getting the headlines; particles, branding, the new executive team, regulatory compliance and a host of other issues have all been given robust discussion in both full meetings, our sub-groups and ad-hoc meetings held on behalf of the DSG. These do not happen just by accident, and I would like to thank Dawn Clasper and Tina Wrighton for their efforts in the DSG Secretariat. But also Gail Ross (Head of Communication), who has been supportive of the work that we do and understands the importance of this forum and the engagement with our community, the organisations that we represent and bringing those voices to the site.

Last year, I intimated my ongoing frustration that the DSG has become an increasingly 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. A great deal of this frustration has can be found due to the absence of a LTP, a plan that we can scrutinise and hold as the 'one version of the truth'. I hope that this frustration can be eased as we begin to see sight of the plan.

We have all heard murmuring and rumours about the dates contained in the LTP and the assumption that the 'interim end state' will shift to the right by many decades. We all know that the publicised dates, the milestones communicated to our community, to our politicians and to our supply chain for the last two decades have not been founded in reality. I believe that when the dust settles, the dates originally published by the UKAE on the plants shut-down will ring as true today, as they did in the mid-1990's. Dounreay is a complex site, it will take many decades to safety decommission.

It then poses the question of how we have got into this position:

Members, let me be clear. Caithness has been misled by the promises presented by the PBO (Parent Body Organisation); enthusiastically endorsed by successive governments, sponsor departments, regulators and agencies. We were sold a promise of decommissioning at a speed never possible, never technically practicable. The dates that entered the public domain were never achievable, and we have been sold a false economy.

Hundreds of millions of pounds, tax payers money, that should have been invested in our community, into frontline decommissioning across the nuclear estate, into socio-economics and building resilience in our nuclear communities, was funnelled into a failed experiment. At the detriment of our community and at the detriment to the nuclear industry, and to our workforce who throughout it all, continued to do their jobs and work.

We will live with the failed era of the PBO for many years and potentially decades to come. But when the Lifetime Plan is published, this forum has a power of work to do. I will need your help... because of our scrutiny of this plan. A plan that will lead us into real dates, real activity and real expectations... will be the basis of the work this forum does for decades to come.

As hard as it might be to do, as a community, we need to draw a line under the past the mistakes, the false-promises and the distrust. We now need to find a new baseline; to find a way for Dounreay and the decommissioning mission to be outward facing with a plan that is understood by our community, embraced by our supply chain and providing inspiration and opportunity for our people.

We know that this forum is enshrined in Law, the Energy Act (2004) and that we are given the opportunity as a nuclear community to put our representation to site operators, regulators and of course the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority itself. I am very proud that we command the respect of all the aforementioned organisations, and that they don't just facilitate our discussion and listen to our contributions... we can, and do make a difference. We can and do influence for positive change.

I have made it very clear in the past that proper engagement is vital. Our influence as local, regional and national stakeholders can be far-reaching and we must use this forum to ensure our voice is heard. We know all too well the unintended consequences of decisions being taken without proper consultation and appropriate communication.

Having returned from the Dounreay Site last week with a number of DSG Members, I welcome the regular meetings with senior members of the NRS Dounreay team. These are complemented by periodic meetings with the NDA and with the Chair of NRS Lawrie Haynes. These have proven very useful and informative and I want to make clear that your representation can, and does make its way to the ears of the most senior and influential figures within the industry.

Throughout the 2023/24 term, the DSG Business meeting have continued to meet fortnightly ensuring information flowed between the business meeting and members. I would like to thank my Vice-Chair Davie Alexander, who also acts as Chair of the Socio Economic Sub Group. Gillian Coghill, Chair of the Site Restoration Sub Group and Buldoo Residents Group, Peter Faccenda, Vice-Chair of our Socio Economic Sub Group and Roger Saxon, Vice-Chair of the Site Restoration Sub Group. Their time, effort and contributions cannot be understated and I believe it is one of the most capable and knowledgeable Site Stakeholder Groups in the Country.

I would like to thank the wider 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 2023-24

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

Meetings attended by DSG representatives

On behalf of the DSG, myself, Davie and Gillian have attended the Scottish Government Scottish Nuclear Sites meetings through the course of the last year providing a DSG update for regulators, observers and fellow SSG stakeholders as well as attending forums for information and consultation.

An in-person meeting of the SSG Chairs Forum was hosted in Manchester last year, 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 beneficial. In the last six years I have been involved with the DSG, I am yet to be invited to a meeting onsite at any other station/or research complex through the NDA forums. I feel this is a missed opportunity.

Scottish Roadshows for Technology and Innovation have been fruitful exercises, and we appreciate the opportunity to take part. Just next week, I expect to attend the Cross Party Group for Civil Nuclear, a forum many years in the making.

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
 - Advisory Board for Focus North
 - Caithness Community Planning Partnership
 - Cross Party Group on Civil Nuclear (Holyrood)

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 and its constituent organisations contribute greatly to the decommissioning ecosystem, socio-economic and regional policy, development and scrutiny... 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.

Changes to personnel

We have seen people within the Dounreay site 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. We worked incredibly well with Barrie Crann, who will be sorely missed.

I know that the Dounreay site will be making an effort to embed their new structure and their new team into the work that we do at the DSG. I wish them well.

Looking forward

The new NRS structure 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 continued commitment from David Peattie, CEO of the NDA, that funding will continue to be safeguarded, we will work with NRS, NDA, regulators and union officials to raise any concerns. It is important Dounreay maintains its identity and that, as a division of the business, it is given the right tools and support to tackle the decommissioning missions unique to a category 1 site.

Whilst the extension to limited operations at NRTE Vulcan announced last year were welcomed locally, we are conscious that the direction of travel for Vulcan and the NDA look clearer with every day. 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

Yesterday, I attended the Focus North Conference in Wick, on behalf of the DSG.

I was reminded of the colossal opportunities in this area, and that we have a choice. We can let things happen to us; or we can shape those changes, leverage the very best outcomes and work collectively to make the Far North of Scotland the best place in this country, to live, to learn and to have rewarding work.

My own quote was even thrown back to me by Magnus Davidson and I make no apology for repeating it here today. We are looking for a hand-up not a hand out, and we should be positioning ourselves as a region that can help solve national issues, deliver government priorities and be held high as a community that works with-not against legislators and governors.

Whether our sights lie at Westminster, Holyrood or Glen Urquhart Road. We must be part of the solution, and we must add to recent wins. The extension of the PSO for Wick to Aberdeen has been a true highlight of cross-party and stakeholder led campaigning...

and demonstrates clearly that where there is will and political necessity... we can deliver for our region. And I would like to thank you all, my Council colleagues, Council Leader Raymond Bremner, the team of Highland Council Officers including David Sutherland, MSP Marie Todd and of course Trudy Morris of the Caithness Chamber of Commerce for their collective efforts.

In what I hope will be the last year of my potential five-year limit, I am reminded of why I entered the Highland Council and why I chose to 'go again' in 2022. It is a promise I made to our nuclear community that they would have a strong voice and champion, one that would give them a voice at every table I sat at.

In preparing my Report for the AGM, I am reminded every year of the breadth of discussion, debate and scrutiny conducted by this membership. It would be easy to scale-back our focus, our remit and our efforts and adopt approaches like our sister SSGs where meetings are dominated by the small changes to the skyline, the hand-over of land for development, or socio-economics through 'good neighbour funding'. But we mustn't.

Amid turbulence at home and abroad. Industrial unhappiness, bad press, ill-feeling and distrust. Businesses, workers and stakeholders in the Far North demand certainty, stability and honesty 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.



Provost Struan Mackie
DSG Chair
21st March 2023