

NuclearCONNECT

MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT • SUPPLIERS

WWW.NUCLEARCONNECT.CO.UK

ISSUE 14 JULY 2013 £12.50



Success for Magnox sites



Innovation support
brings results?

Government initiatives
spurring on SME success

Legacy waste
solutions



Q&A

with
**CLIVE
WHITE**
AMEC

Why use an SME?

written by
**ANDY
LEASK**
Rodgers Leask

Apprentice to MD at Springfields

written by
**BRYONY
STUART**
NuclearCONNECT

MANAGING RADIOACTIVE WASTE SAFELY

On 13th May, the Government issued a call for evidence on the siting process for a deep geological disposal facility. This follows the decision of Cumbria County Council's vote to withdraw from the process to find a site earlier in January this year, after formally expressing an interest in the process in partnership with Allerdale and Copeland Borough Councils. In this edition, Cheryl Parkhouse and Gareth Davies provide a brief overview of the background to the MRWS process undertaken by the UK Government and next steps.



■ ■
Words:
Gareth Davies
and Cheryl
Parkhouse
Burges Salmon

Background

Since previous work in the UK to develop a long-term solution for the UK's radioactive waste ended in 1997 with the refusal of planning for an underground rock characterisation facility, a new approach was developed. In 2001, the Government introduced the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) programme to address the issue of the long-term management of radioactive waste. In 2003 an independent expert body, the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM), was created to provide scrutiny and advice to Government.

Following extensive public and stakeholder engagement of the possible options, CoRWM recommended to the Government that geological disposal, coupled with safe and secure interim storage, was the preferred option for the long-term management of higher activity waste in the UK. A number of other countries have also opted for geological disposal including Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, USA and Sweden. Finland and Sweden are well advanced in investigating their preferred sites for a facility for spent fuel and already have shallow geological facilities for the disposal of ILW and LLW.

In 2008, the MRWS White Paper (which does not apply to Scotland or

the Scottish devolved administration) outlined the proposed framework and process for implementing geological disposal. Based on the central principles of voluntarism (dependent upon a community voluntarily expressing an interest to take part in the process) and partnership, the Government invited communities to express an interest to begin 'without commitment' discussions to host such a facility.

The MRWS process

The MRWS White Paper (June 2008) set out a six-staged process (see Figure 1). The voluntarism principle is developed through the following key decision points for a volunteer community:

- a. 'Expression of Interest', where communities can register their 'without commitment interest' to enter into discussions with Government about potential involvement in the process; and
- b. 'Decision to Participate', where a local authority makes a formal commitment to participate in the siting process, but still without commitment to host the facility.

A Right of Withdrawal also remains up until the start of underground

operations and construction at Stage 6, the final stage.

Other significant processes and considerations in the siting process will include: planning arrangements and applications; and the assessment of environmental effects and sustainability through a Strategic Environmental Assessment integrated into a wider Sustainability Appraisal (including social and economic factors) and an Environmental Impact Assessment. These processes will also require public consultation.

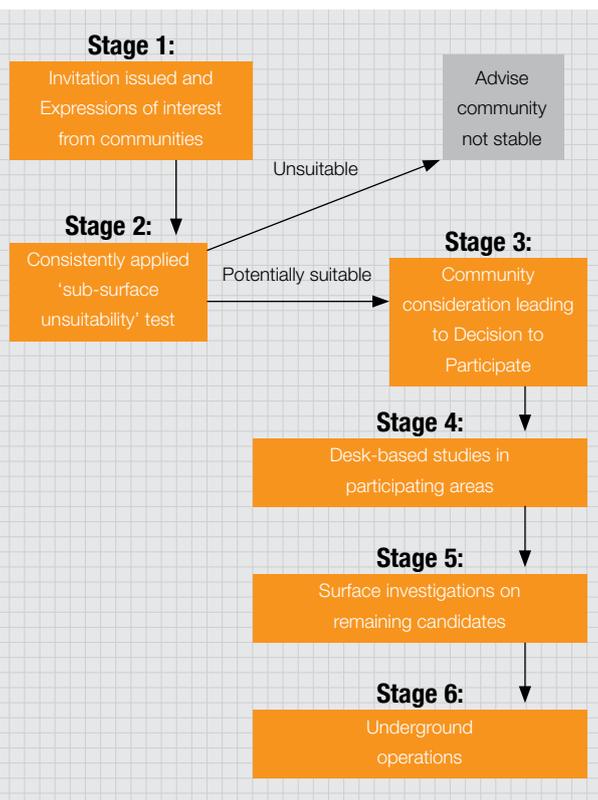
Roles and responsibilities

Whilst the UK Government (the Department of Energy and Climate Change – DECC) holds overall responsibility for the MRWS programme, there are also a number of other central roles and responsibilities:

Nuclear Decommissioning

Authority (NDA): the strategic organisation, responsible for planning and implementing Government policy on the long-term management of nuclear waste. In addition to its statutory responsibility under the Energy Act 2004 for decommissioning its designated sites (principally ex-BNFL and UKAEA civil nuclear sites), the NDA will also undertake research and development to support delivery of the repository.

Figure 1 MRWS six-stage process



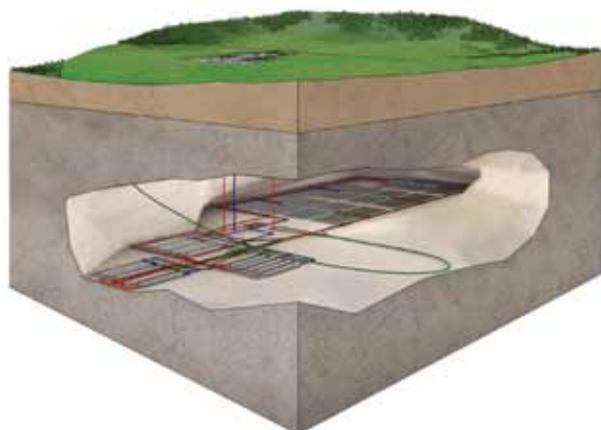
■ ■

Image:

Below: courtesy of MRWS

Radioactive Waste Management

Directive (RWMD): currently a directorate of the NDA, responsible for the delivery of the programme. Alongside its current work to provide radioactive waste management solutions through its Letter of Compliance (LoC) process, its objectives for the programme include: engagement with stakeholders and communities to identify a site; development of the specification, design, safety case and environmental and sustainability assessments; optimisation of the management of Higher Activity Waste (developing the existing LoC process); delivery of a focused R&D programme to support geological disposal and optimised packaging solutions; and development of sustainable, innovative and



cost-effective solutions with public support. RWMD is also referred to as a “prospective site licence company (SLC)”, to be developed as an entity capable of holding the initial environmental permits required for intrusive site investigations and, eventually, a nuclear site licence.

Independent regulators: to ensure that safety, security and environment legislation and standards are met which are also central to the process with staged authorisation of licences and approvals. These will include: the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), currently an agency of the HSE, but shortly due to become an independent statutory authority once the draft Energy Bill 2012 is passed by Parliament; the Environment Agency; and Department of Transport (and the devolved administration equivalents of these).

CoRWM: (with modified terms of reference) continues to have an important role in providing independent scrutiny of the proposals and delivery of the facility, including storage and disposal.

Volunteer communities and the decision-making body: this includes the Local Government decision-making authority for the host community to be part of the partnership approach and local decision-making during the process.

Recent events and next steps

Following the issue of an invitation to express an interest in the MRWS process in 2008, Copeland and Allerdale Borough Councils and Cumbria County Council submitted a formal Expression of Interest. (An informal interest was also shown by Shepway District Council in Kent, but no formal application was made). In January, both Allerdale and Copeland Borough Councils voted in favour to proceed to Stage 4, but Cumbria County Council voted to withdraw. As a previous undertaking was given that the existing site selection process would only continue if there was agreement at both Borough and County level, this has left the MRWS process with no volunteer community at present.

However, DECC’s (Edward Davey MP) press notice released following this decision stated that the Government remains firmly committed to geological disposal as the right policy for long-term safe and secure management of higher activity

radioactive waste, and continues to support the voluntarism and partnership approach. It stated that the Government “will now embark on a renewed drive to ensure that the case for hosting a geological disposal facility is drawn to the attention of the communities and to encourage further local authorities to come forward ... to join the process and reflect on experiences to date”.

In order to commence this ‘lessons learned’ process, on Monday 13th May 2013, the Government released an open consultation, ‘Managing Radioactive Waste Safely: call for evidence on the siting process for a Geological Disposal Facility’. This was an open consultation inviting views on the site selection aspects of the ongoing MRWS programme from those engaged in (or interested observers of) the siting process to date. Comments and evidence were requested by 10th June 2013.

Therefore, whilst the current process has been temporarily stalled by the recent turn of events in Cumbria, the management of the UK’s radioactive waste still remains high on the agenda for the nuclear industry and Government. Attention is still firmly focused on the developments which have been achieved to date to realise a long-term solution for radioactive waste management and those which have yet to come once the views requested have been collated and reflected upon. It certainly is a case of “watch this space”!

If this article raises any issues you would like to discuss or you would like to suggest subjects for future articles, please contact:

Cheryl Parkhouse: email cheryl.parkhouse@burgess-salmon.com; tel: 0117 902 6640

Gareth Davies: email gareth.davies@burgess-salmon.com; tel: 0117 307 6920.

The latest version of the Burgess Salmon nuclear glossary of key terms and acronyms is now available to be downloaded at www.niauk.org/a-to-z-glossary

■ ■

www.burgesssalmon.co.uk