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Mr Turnbull

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POWER STATION ENDURANCE

'Newsnight', on BBC2 last night, transmitted a particularly damaging piece on power station endurance.

They stated that published information from the Department of Energy disproved Peter Walker's public assertion that endurance was sufficient until well into 1985. The programme stated that the Government's own figures clearly showed that power cuts would be needed well before the end of the year.

This conclusion was based on the entirely erroneous assumption that power station stocks cannot fall below 8 mt before the system becomes unstable and power cuts are essential. The figure of 8 mt was stated as an objective fact and the viewer given the impression that official figures clearly showed the need for power cuts this year. Even more damaging, the reporter stated that the Department of Energy had been given an opportunity to comment on these conclusions but had declined.

I have confirmed again with the Department of Energy that there is no substance in this report. It is true that in 1974, a figure of 6 mt of power station stocks was crucial. However, this was because stocks were so badly

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distributed. This time every effort has been made to optimise distribution in order that the maximum tonnage of stocks can be used.

Energy do admit, however, that the split between working and non-working pits has resulted in some maldistribution. As a consequence, there are perhaps 2.5 mt of coal stocks at power stations which would not be useable before power cuts were required. However, this figure has been discounted in the Department of Energy's projections of power station endurance. These show that there is no question of power cuts this year, and that if coal deliveries can average 0.52 mt per week, we shall be able to endure right through until next Winter.

I have also spoken to the Department of Energy Press Office (Romola) and suggested that the Government should have a robust defence on this point. She stated that the Department of Energy Press Office had been misquoted in connection with this programme and she is awaiting a copy of the transcript.

Conclusion

It is important that we stress that endurance is assured until well into next year. It would be extremely damaging if it is clearly perceived that power cuts will be essential this year. This point should be stressed at MISC

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