



cc NO

Prime Minister

Await D Fin and MAFF

SELLAFIELD DISCHARGES

At your meeting on July 24 (recorded in your Private Secretary's letter of July 25) it was agreed to adopt option 1 in the paper Patrick Jenkin had circulated about the long-term programme for reducing discharges by British Nuclear Fuels plc from Sellafield. However, it was also agreed that the Secretary of State for Energy should have further discussions with the company's management about the possibility of bringing forward the date of operation of option 1 from 1982. Discussions have now taken place at official level, with the involvement of the Radiochemical Inspectorate and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

The UK has a specific obligation to submit a report on the long-term programme before the end of the year to the Paris Commission on the prevention of marine pollution from land-based sources, and Parliament must be told of our decision first. The content of option 1 remains as described in Patrick Jenkin's paper.

On the timetable, BNFL have confirmed that they will be able to bring the relevant new plant into operation by mid 1991, without prejudicing other developments at Sellafield or creating new safety hazards. However, as the plant will take some time to run in, they are not willing to commit themselves at this stage to a specific date for the full achievement of the resulting reduction in discharges. After that, there will also be a time lag of a couple of years before the full benefit is achieved in terms of reduced doses to the critical group of fish and shellfish eaters. In the light of these factors, it would be best for the announcement to refer specifically to the date for the coming into operation of the new plant, and to describe the reduced dose cautiously as 'well below 10%' of the ICRP limit, rather than the 3% which is actually estimated.

There was a wish that the announcement should be a low key one. We therefore propose, if you and other colleagues agree, a Written Answer on the lines of the attached draft, which is based on consultation at official level. Consistently with the low key approach, this announcement is not presented as a direct response to the Black Report on health effects in the area (which was published in July, also with a Written Answer), but cross-references to specific recommendations in that report are made where appropriate.

I am copying this minute to the Lord President, the Home Secretary, the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Energy, Defence, Scotland, Wales, Employment, the Lord Privy Seal, the Minister of Agriculture, the Chief Secretary, the Minister for Health, to Sir Robert Armstrong, and to Dr Nicholson.

Nicola Cropp

pp WILLIAM WALDEGRAVE (approved by the Minister and signed in his absence)

3 December 1984

SELLAFIELD DISCHARGES:

DRAFT WRITTEN ANSWER

Q. To ask the Secretary of State of the Environment, what measures are being taken to reduce discharges of radioactivity from Sellafield.

A. The Radiochemical Inspectorate of my Department, jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, have already put forward formal proposals for a variation of the authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, so that the limits will reflect the substantial reductions in actual discharges that have been achieved in the past few years and place extra controls on the amounts discharged over short periods, and on solvent and particulates. This variation, which also contains a formal requirement that the best practicable means must be used to limit discharges, is expected to come into force in January.

The Site Ion Exchange Plant (SIXEP), constructed at a cost of £130m, will come into operation next year and will make possible a further reduction in discharges of caesium, to one tenth of the maximum released in recent years. The new salt evaporator, also due to come into operation next year at a cost of £30m, will make possible a parallel reduction in discharges of plutonium and other alpha emitters, to about 200 curies a year. Formal proposals to replace the existing authorisation by a new and more stringent one will be put forward by the Authorising Departments next year, and the opportunity will also be taken to set specific limits on a much larger number of individual radionuclides. The local authorities will be consulted about the new draft authorisation, as will the water and health authorities, and sea fisheries committees.

Beyond that, the achievement of a further significant reduction on a continuing basis depends on the construction of a major new treatment plant. The government, after a review of the options in consultation with the company, has approved the company's proposal to build a floc precipitation plant, costing £150m, which would be in operation by 1991. The aim is to reduce discharges to less than 20 curies a year of alpha activity and about 8000 curies a

year of beta/gamma activity. The latter figure is below the level currently achieved by the only plant in any way comparable, the newer French reprocessing plant at Cap de la Hague, and the alpha figure is approximately equal to the current figure for that plant. These levels will also be maintained after the new reprocessing plant for oxide fuel comes into operation; and further reductions will be obtained when the present reprocessing plant for magnox fuel goes out of operation in the early years of the next century.

This programme of measures complies with the recommendation of the Paris Commission on the prevention of pollution from land-based sources that contracting parties should take account of the best available technology at nuclear reprocessing plants, in order to minimise radioactive discharges to the marine environment. The Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee have confirmed that, in their view, this programme takes full account of all the scientific evidence, and is consistent with the United Kingdom's policy objectives for radioactive waste management, particularly the objective of reducing discharges to the lowest level reasonably practicable. The estimated annual radiation dose to the small critical group of people eating large amounts of fish and shellfish will be reduced to well below 10% of the limit recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection, as compared with 54% in 1982.

The two Authorising Departments plan to review the authorisation every 3 years, in line with a recommendation in the Black Report. For the purposes of such reviews, they will draw upon the results from an expanded programme of environmental monitoring they have now required BNFL to carry out as from January 1985, as well as their own check monitoring and relevant research. They will also take full account of advice on the health aspects of discharges, and my rt hon friend the Minister for Health is considering, in the light of the Black Report, how such advice can be best provided.

ENO. Affairs July '80

SELLAFIELD LEAK

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