



PRIME MINISTER

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

I have been looking critically at our present policy on the disposal of radioactive waste, in the light of suggestions made to me by colleagues and by the Chairman of the CEBG. Some modification is necessary and I seek your agreement to the course I now propose to take.

Present policy on the management of heat-generating waste is not in dispute. It is to be stored for at least 50 years. Meanwhile work on establishing the best form of disposal for it continues. What is in dispute is how to handle short-lived low and intermediate wastes and longer-lived intermediate wastes.

My predecessor told the House on 24 January this year that he had asked NIREX to select at least 2 other sites, to be considered alongside Elstow in Bedfordshire as possible sites for a near-surface disposal facility for the shorter-lived wastes. He also said that he had asked NIREX to identify at least 3 possible sites for a deep facility for longer-lived wastes. NIREX have given priority to the search for near-surface sites, and now have a list they could announce.

Meanwhile both the CEGB and the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee have expressed to me their concern that the planning stages for the two types of facility might overlap. This would be a burden that the nuclear industry could not carry. It would also mean that possibly 7 or 8 sites could be a focus for opponents to the nuclear industry. I believe that this concern is justified and that for the present we should concentrate on the shallow sites for low-level waste only.



However, the Chairman of the CEBG has recently expressed a preference for a single site that would take both types of waste, and he has a possible location in mind. A private company, Ensec Ltd have expressed a similar preference, but with the important distinction that the whole enterprise be undertaken by the private sector rather than NIREX on an island site which they have already identified. Some colleagues have also queried the wisdom of having 3 or 4 potential near-surface sites under consideration in public for a period that could possibly extend beyond the life of the present Parliament. These developments strengthened my resolve to review the whole situation. I have considered 4 main options.

Option 1: Do Nothing

One of the main responsibilities given to the Secretary of State for the Environment in the White Paper on Radioactive Waste Management in 1982 is to "ensure that waste management problems are dealt with before any large nuclear programme is undertaken". The evidence we gave to the Sizewell Inquiry and to the Select Committee on the Environment in their current study of radioactive waste, reflected that commitment.

✓ Silence is not an option. It is widely known in the media and - I suspect - among colleagues in the House that NIREX are in a position to name sites. An announcement was expected in October. It is now expected before Christmas. Prolonged delay to an announcement would undermine the credibility of NIREX at a time when it has just been incorporated as an independent company to make it more effective. An announcement that the identification of sites had been delayed indefinitely would destroy the credibility of our policy that satisfactory sites can be found and that radioactive waste can be disposed of in an acceptable manner. The anti-nuclear brigade would represent it as a further victory - after the termination of the deep



drilling programme in 1981 and the withdrawal from Billingham in January this year. The Inspector might want to re-open the Sizewell Inquiry. For all these reasons I rule this option out.

Option 2: Stick to Existing Policy

Four sites (including Elstow) have been identified by NIREX for a near-surface disposal facility. So far NIREX has not proceeded with the search for a deep facility and if we were to pursue this option I would not want them to do so. NIREX's list of 4 represents a balanced choice between different types of location and geology. Under present policy they would all be investigated geologically and would all be taken to a public inquiry. This procedure would fulfil the commitment my predecessor gave that the merits of Elstow would be considered alongside those of other sites. It would guard against the failure (following detailed investigation) of a particular site on geological grounds. It is the option most likely to deliver a site: it is unlikely that an Inspector at a public inquiry would reject them all. The disadvantage, which I do not underrate, is that it would lead to sustained opposition in 4 areas for a long period, probably until the result of the public inquiry was known in 1990. I am therefore inclined to do something different.

Option 3: Single Site

This could be a single site which is either a near-surface facility or one which also encompassed a deep facility. Such an approach would reduce to a minimum the communities blighted. The danger is that if detailed investigations showed the site to be geologically unsound, the whole process of site selection would have to begin again. This would be very damaging indeed for the credibility of our policy. It would also be an abrupt reversal of our existing policy and of the commitments we have given to have a proper comparison of sites. It would be a high-risk strategy. Accordingly it is not one I favour.



Option 4 and Recommendation

We must look in detail at more than one site. We must also find some ways of reducing the extent of the blight. There would be advantage in investigating sites that were possibly suitable for both the deep and less deep types of facility, since we shall ultimately need both. We should include at least one coastal site because of defence needs. Elstow must be in the list both because of its technical merit and because we must not abandon yet another site in the face of protest. We must also consider Ensec's proposals. In trusting the development not to NIREX but to a private company without the electricity and nuclear industries' resources behind it would be a radical and controversial change of policy in an area which is already fraught enough. What I propose, however, will not prevent the private sector from putting forward their proposals for a site if, indeed, they have identified a good one and can deliver it.

Accordingly, I propose a fourth option. I suggest that NIREX be encouraged to investigate 4 sites, but that once the detailed investigations are complete, in just over a year's time, only one to be put forward to a public inquiry. This would allow 3 sites to be substantially cleared from blight while the best is taken to an inquiry. If Ensec produce a serious site, their site could be included in the SDO for investigation alongside NIREX's sites and might turn out to be a competitor for the ultimate choice.

The 4 sites I think we should consider are ^① Elstow; ^② Fulbeck in Lincolnshire, because the indications so far are that it is the best site geologically for a near-surface facility; ^③ Bradwell in Essex because it is on the coast and may also be suitable for both types of facility; and a site on the Woburn estate near Ridgemont in Bedfordshire because it too may also be suitable for both types of facility. The first 3 sites are in public ownership and there should



be no problems of access or availability. The Woburn estate, of course, is not. The trustees of the Woburn Abbey Estate are, however, prepared to make a site available and are confident that they can withstand the public pressure that may result. It is a site favoured by the Chairman of the CEGB. I am less certain how it might work out in practice.

If you and colleagues agree to what I propose, I would like to make an announcement before the House rises for Christmas. If there is any delay there is a considerable risk that the names of the sites will leak. This could be fatal. Experience so far underlines the need for careful preparation of any announcement - which means we should reach a decision very quickly if NIREX are to prepare properly for an announcement on this timetable.

I would envisage that I would publish, at the same time or as soon as possible thereafter, a draft of the Special Development Order, necessary to give planning permission for the site investigations. After 5 or 6 weeks of consultation on its details the SDO could be introduced at the beginning of February. It will inevitably be prayed against so that we would need to arrange for a debate in February. Subject to that debate, site investigations could then begin, on schedule, in March 1986. They would be concluded that a year later and 3 sites could be put out of their misery in spring or early summer 1987.

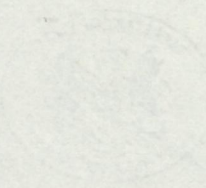
I would be grateful for your agreement and that of colleagues to what I propose. Could I ask for comments please by close of play, Monday 9 December. Copies of this minute go to members of H, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Energy.

K.B.

K B

4 December 1985

HOME AFFAIRS : Disposal Nuclear waste . July 1979



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD
WHITEHALL PLACE, LONDON SW1A 2HH



From the Minister

CONFIDENTIAL - CMO

PRIME MINISTER

NBPM

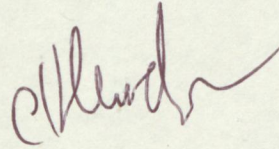
16 December 1985

1. DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

1. I have seen Kenneth Baker's minute of 4 December to you on the disposal of radioactive waste. I have now also seen his paper of 13 December with revised proposals.
2. I am concerned that under the preferred option (option 4) one of the coastal sites has been dropped, which would have the effect of shifting the balance in favour of inland clay sites. Such sites bring with them the potential risk of interaction of contaminated surface water with adjacent agricultural land. Partly for this reason NIREX were earlier asked to put forward a combination of two coastal and two inland sites. Under option 4 the remaining coastal site appears to be the less favourable of the 2 original candidates and I would strongly favour the reinstatement of a second coastal site to retain parity.
3. Like Michael Heseltine, I am also concerned about the proposed change in planning procedures. I doubt the wisdom of relying upon a favourable outcome deriving from the consideration of just one site at a public inquiry; on the other hand, I appreciate the possible widescale and sustained opposition that might be generated by consideration of a number of sites. One possible solution which would have the advantages of keeping our options open would be to go for two sites with different geological and geographical characteristics to be considered at the public enquiry. This would usefully keep both inland and coastal sites as runners whilst reducing the scope for widescale public opposition.

/ I think we ...

4. I think we need to consider very carefully the consequences of changing course at this late stage. I therefore welcome the decision to discuss the matter at H Committee tomorrow. Unfortunately I shall be in Brussels but I have arranged for Peggy Fenner to attend in my place.
5. I am copying this minute to member of H, the Defence and Energy Secretaries, and Sir Robert Armstrong.

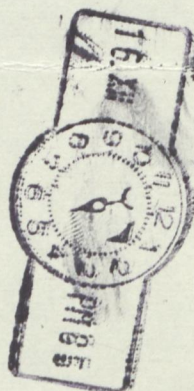


for

M J

(Approved by the Minister
and signed in his absence)

Home Affairs
DISPOSAL OF NUCLEAR
WASTE 7/79



CONFIDENTIAL

CG/BG



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

11 December 1985

Dear Kenneth

ABPM

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

I have seen your minute to the Prime Minister and the response by her Private Secretary and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Defence. In the light of those comments, I think it would be preferable if we were to discuss this at H Committee as originally intended and I have therefore arranged for it to go on to the agenda for our meeting on Tuesday 17 December. The Prime Minister is content that the matter should be handled in this way.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister, the members of H Committee, the Secretaries of State for Energy and for Defence, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'John' followed by a surname.

The Rt Hon Kenneth Baker MP

CONFIDENTIAL

Home Affairs 7/79

Nuclear Waste





10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

You might also to be
aware that the Bradwell,
Essex site - a coastal
one - is in the Chief
Whip's constituency.

MEVA 11/12

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



WJG

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY
THAMES HOUSE SOUTH
MILLBANK LONDON SW1P 4QJ

PRIME MINISTER

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

I have seen Kenneth Baker's minute of December 4; ^{WITH MSA} your Private Secretary's letter of December 9, ^{WITH MSA} and Michael Heseltine's, George Younger's and Nicholas Edwards' minutes of the same date.

While I am convinced that a fresh approach is needed, I believe that the implications of Kenneth's proposal require very careful consideration. I am therefore glad that we are to discuss Kenneth's proposals in H Committee, which will allow me time to discuss the issues further with Lord Marshall.

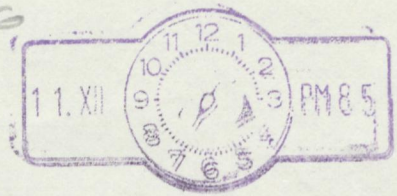
I am copying this to members of H Committee, Michael Heseltine and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Secretary of State for Energy

December 1985

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

HONG KONG AFFAIRS JULY '79
DISPOSAL OF NUCLEAR WASTE





PRIME MINISTER

NBPM at the stage

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

I have seen Kenneth Baker's minute to you of 4 December.

I agree that the arguments deployed in Kenneth's minute powerfully support the selection of Option 4 and the action he proposes to pursue it. It is clearly necessary to make early provision for progress in the development of disposal sites for low and intermediate level wastes. Option 1 is therefore not feasible. Option 2 risks provoking sustained opposition in several areas at once. Option 3 would involve a prolonged series of difficulties if the first site identified, and possibly succeeding sites as well, proved to be non-runners. Option 4 seems least likely to arouse immediate severe opposition while the industry makes progress with essential studies. The overwhelming advantage of Option 4 however, is that it avoids as far as possible extensive and complicated Public Inquiries; these are a burden not only for the industry but equally for the staff of the Government Departments, such as mine, which would be closely involved in any Inquiry.

I am copying this minute to members of H Committee, to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Secretary of State for Energy and to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

NICHOLAS RIDLEY

10 December 1985

HOME AFFAIRS; Nuclear Waste Disposal, July 1979





SCOTTISH OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

CONFIDENTIAL - CMO

Prime Minister

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

I refer to Kenneth Baker's minute to you of 4 December.

Progress towards long-term arrangements for the disposal of nuclear waste has as we all know been slow and difficult. As Kenneth Baker points out, the anti-nuclear lobby can claim a number of successes, including not only the cessation of the deep drilling programme and the abandonment of Billingham which he mentions but also the indefinite cessation of the annual sea dump. We are therefore at a very critical stage, and it does appear to me that a significant departure from our previously-announced programme of consultation and inquiry (Option 3 in the minute) for a different procedure aimed primarily at speed (Option 4) is likely to come under very close critical scrutiny and may be difficult to justify publicly. However, since the four NIREX sites are all in England, DOE are in a better position than I to judge whether this preferred option, and the further shift in policy which it involves, can be presented as a justifiable change.

I am however very concerned about the implications of possibly including in the list a so far unspecified island site which Ensec are said to have in mind. If this were to be in Scotland, the responsibilities which I have for planning would in practical and political terms rule out the making of a single SDO covering it together with the four English sites. It would have to be subject to separate procedures and public examination. Secondly, the public inquiry into the Dounreay ERDP, which will take place early next year, will inevitably raise a number of allied issues including the disposal of wastes. (We are already being pressed hard by some of the objectors about the relationship between Dounreay and a proposal by Ensec that waste might be disposed of at Stormy Bank in the

Pentland Firth.) In my view, it would not be sensible for the Government to be seen to be increasing the uncertainty on this front. For these reasons, and also because I think that the inclusion of an unknown Ensec site must tend to undermine the standing of the list produced by NIREX, to whom the Government has given the responsibility of reporting on suitable sites, I would oppose any reference to the Ensec site in the announcement. If it is to be referred to, it must be established beforehand whether the proposal involves an island off the coast of Scotland; if it does, I should want to be fully consulted before the terms of any announcement are agreed.

I am copying this minute to members of H, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Energy.

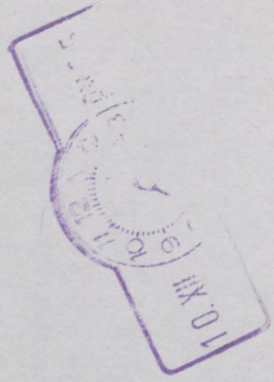
C.Y.

G.Y.

10 December 1985

Home Affairs July 1979

Disposal of Nuclear Waste





CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

I have seen Kenneth Baker's memorandum of 4 December to you about his wish to announce, before Christmas, his selection of possible sites for the disposal of low level wastes for further study.

I agree with his view that there should be no further delay in announcing our selection of sites. I also agree with his proposed publication of a draft of the Special Development Order as soon as possible. I have no comments on the choice of sites to be announced.

However, I have reservations about any public withdrawal from the investigatory process which we announced in January, and I am not convinced of the merits of option 4. I concur with Kenneth's view that option 2 is the one most likely to deliver a site, and I do not think we should lightly abandon it. Nor do I think that we need to at this stage in the process. Options 2 and 4 follow a common path initially and it will be time enough to change course (if we then decide to do so) after the geological investigation of the selected sites is completed. That investigation might throw up two, or even more, sites of roughly equal merit and a joint Inquiry might then clearly be the better choice. If we find one is outstandingly better, we will have a very much better reason for adopting the line suggested in option 4 than we presently seem to have.

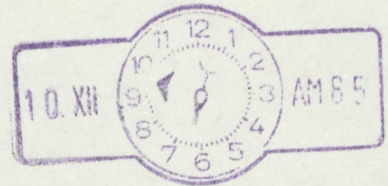
/ I am copying this minute to members of H Committee, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Energy.

NE

9 December 1985

R N E

RECEIVED



CONGRATULATIONS

How very
interesting
of his wife
the



MO 18

PRIME MINISTER

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

The Environment Secretary sent me a copy of his minute of 4th December 1985 to you on the disposal of radioactive waste.

2. I think it would be useful if I set out my Department's needs for the disposal of radioactive wastes arising from defence nuclear programmes. We require shallow and deep land disposal facilities and, if the former were located inland, we should need a coastal site for the burial of reactor compartments from decommissioned nuclear submarines, for which transport by sea is the only feasible method. I am concerned therefore that the proposed number of coastal sites has been reduced from two to one, thereby reducing the chances of such a site being selected. I believe that any Parliamentary announcement should mention the probable need, in the early 1990s, if an inland site were to be selected by the public inquiry, for a small coastal site to take major items of equipment from these decommissioning operations. Work on



identifying such a site and planning its development would need to begin, on a contingency basis, in early 1986 in consultation with NIREX and with the other Government Departments concerned.

3. On the question of putting only one site, rather than four, to a public inquiry, I believe we need to consider the risk of delay to the whole disposal programme if the inquiry resulted in the rejection of the chosen site. A single site might be found suitable for shallow disposal but be rejected on the grounds that it was unsuitable for both shallow and deep disposal. In these circumstances, a fresh search for sites would have to be undertaken. Not only would this be a considerable set back to the nuclear industry, but it would cause difficulty in providing storage for the increasing quantities of low and intermediate level waste arising from the Defence programme. For this reason, I would also find difficulty in supporting any proposal which delayed the development of a deep site.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Members of the Home and Social Affairs Committee and to the Secretary of State for Energy.

Wish

Ministry of Defence

9th December 1985

HOME AFFAIRS: Nuclear Waste, July 1979



CONGRESSIONAL
LONDON

file 26



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

9 December 1985

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 4 December.

She is content with your Secretary of State's recommendation that his option 4 offers the best way forward, and that he should make an announcement accordingly before Christmas.

The Prime Minister has commented that the timing of any announcement on the single site selected for the public inquiry will need careful consideration. She has also noted that there could be doubts about the extent to which the three other sites are really "cleared" at that stage, because it is conceivable that the public inquiry will produce a negative result.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the members of H, Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), Geoff Dart (Department of Energy) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

MARK ADDISON

Robin Young, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

26

PRIME MINISTER

DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

Mr. Baker's minute attached proposes a way of identifying suitable sites for the disposal of short-lived, low and intermediate radioactive waste which will:

- (i) Identify the most appropriate site geologically;
- (ii) Keep to the Government's commitment to consider a number of possible sites;
- (iii) Minimise "blight";
- (iv) Allow the private sector to get a look in;
- (v) Prevent the arousal of exaggerated public concern through leaks that NIREX can now name possible sites.

The Environment Secretary's preferred option is to set in hand an SDO to give planning permission for the four sites which NIREX have identified. The order could be introduced at the beginning of February. There would need to be a debate. Site investigations should be concluded a year later, and the single site selected for the public inquiry identified in the spring or early summer of 1987.

Two points to note:

- (i) Lord Marshall mentioned to you in September that he thought he had identified a number of suitable sites for intermediate waste disposal. One of these is Woburn Abbey which is favoured by Lord Marshall and which is one of the NIREX four. Personally, I cannot see that the Woburn option will in the end be acceptable to the Estate.

Not a good time for the announcement of the enquiry site - but at least it would 'draw' 3 others - or would it? Suppressing the enquiry produced a negative result.

(ii) DOE are, privately, very doubtful that the private sector option is realistic. They have, however, made room in their scheme for the ENSEC option to be considered, but they believe the Company is likely to prove quite unacceptable for entrusting with such a serious and responsible task. They doubt if the ENSEC proposal can stand up.

Agree option 4, on the Secretary of State's recommendation?
And that the Secretary of State should make an announcement accordingly before Christmas?

Yes not

Man Addison

Mark Addison

6 December 1985



10 DOWNING STREET

MA

Disposal of
Radioactive Waste

Option 4 is fine

But when an
announcement is
made — care

to restate full

Case ek.

APB

[Faint, mirrored handwriting from the reverse side of the page, including words like "system", "work", and "case"]