



The evolution of nuclear waste governance in the UK: the broader democratic context

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Introduction: the evolution of UK nuclear waste governance



- **1976 – 1997:** ‘DAD(A) and the ‘opening up’ of nuclear issues
- **1997-2006:** the participatory turn and the ‘slowing down’ of policy
- **2007 – present:** speeding up, urgency in energy policy and a return to the old ways?
- *More general democratic transformations in UK political culture across different ‘locations’ of decision making*
- *The elephant in the room: the UK’s unique levels of commitments towards new nuclear and how this interacts with the governance of the waste issue*
- *Present challenges and concerns for participation with nuclear waste disposal going forward.*



1976-1997 (1):

- *Nuclear emerges as a public ‘problem’* in the 1970s in the UK.
- **The Flowers Report (1976)** a defining moment in UK nuclear waste governance (with significant implications for new build and plutonium management). *Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP)*:
 - *Raised significant concerns about nuclear waste.*
 - *Outlined that “there should be no commitment to a large programme of nuclear fission power until it has been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that a method exists to ensure the safe containment of long-lived highly radioactive waste for the indefinite future”* (RCEP, 1976: 131)



1976-1997 (2)

- ***The era of the big public inquiry:*** THORP (1978), Sizewell (1982-84), Hinkley C (1988-1989). “tortuous and highly technical” (Owens, 2000) but nevertheless opening up nuclear issues to public scrutiny to an unprecedented extent and politicising the issue.
- ***Nuclear waste:*** Over the same period the UK saw successive unsuccessful attempts at finding a disposal route for higher level nuclear wastes - a strategy led by the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive (Nirex), a body funded by organizations that produced nuclear waste.
- In 1992 Nirex identified a need for a Rock Characterisation Facility (RCF), an underground laboratory to investigate the detailed properties of the potential host rock. Abandoned. “a poor site - chosen for the wrong reasons [i.e. social acceptability]” (DAD)

1997-2006: the participatory turn and 'slowing down' of policy



- UK Nuclear industry in disarray and lack of trust in decision making structures around nuclear waste low.
- Turn towards more participatory planning. More 'horizontal' participatory forms of decision making, from 'government' to 'governance', 'soft spaces' of planning.
- PIU energy Review, CoRWM and other democratic experiments elsewhere (GM nation).



2006: the ‘speeding up’ of policy

- Unexplained turnaround in UK government nuclear policy under Tony Blair.
- Declared “*solution*” to the problem of nuclear waste to partly justify new build programme although CoRWM stipulation that ethical issues surrounding legacy waste cannot be equated with those generated by new build.
- ***2008 Planning Act***, ‘streamlining’ decision making, avoiding protracted planning inquiries with regards to new build.



Siting of nuclear waste: the problem

- In 2008-9, three formal Expressions of Interest were received by Government – from Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland Borough Council and also Cumbria County Council
- For three years (2009-12) the Partnership sought to deepen its understanding on matters such as inventory, geology, planning and ethics, producing a final report in 2012 as a basis for the three councils to decide whether or not to proceed
- On 30 January 2013, the three councils took their decisions: Allerdale and Copeland Borough Councils both voted in favour of proceeding; Cumbria County Council voted against, thus bringing the process to a halt. Cumbria County Council argued there were geologically more suitable areas in the UK than Cumbria.



Back to the old ways?

- Another consultation DECC consultation *implementing Geological Waste disposal*
- Immediate suspicions: "*It looks as though the government didn't like that decision and so they are inventing a new process that will exclude that [County] level of council*" (*Cumbria County Council 2013*).
- 30% of the UK thought to be suitable for a GDR. Screening finished by 2017.
- April 2015, a new law redefining radioactive waste sites as "nationally significant infrastructure projects" which central government therefore have the final say on.
- no one tier of local government should be able to *prevent* the participation of other members of that community" (DECC, 2014: 37).
- Alun Ellis of RWM points out that although the opinions of local communities would be "taken into account", he accepted that ultimately the secretary of state now has the power to overrule communities.
- Greenpeace: "This consultation is just a bit of window dressing since the previous government's last act was to rush through a law allowing ministers to bypass opposition from local councils."

Back to the Flowers report: the ‘Achilles heel’ and the ‘speeding up of policy making.



UK new build.

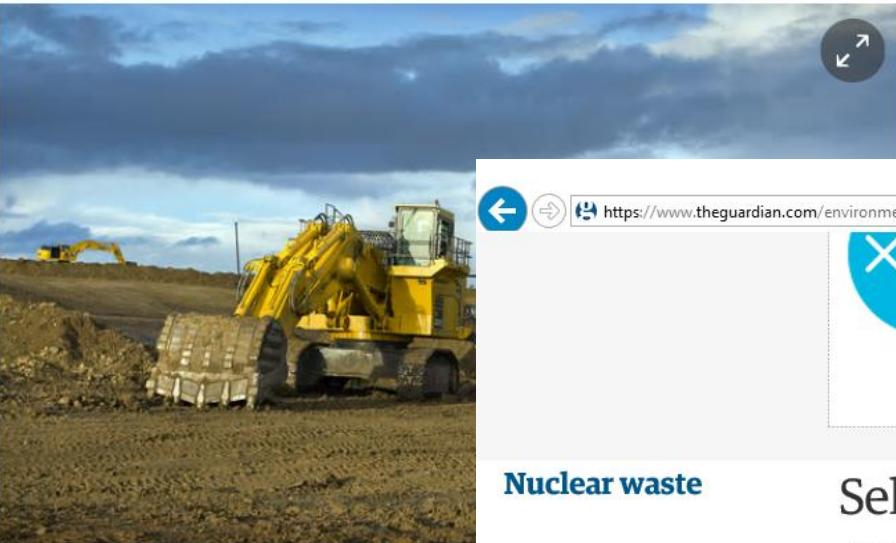
- 2 EPRs at Hinkley point C (originally by Christmas 2017)
- Sizewell C
- ABWRs @ Wylfa
- AP1000s Cumbria
- CP1000 at Bradwell
- Small Modular Reactors
- Unresolved issues regarding plutonium and the use of MOX fuel.
- Regulatory skills and expertise shortages in defence and civil

What exactly is going in to the as-yet hypothetical repository? when is it going in? details of inventory and timescales completely altered due to new build. How can communities make informed decisions in conditions of such uncertainty?

https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/may/30/edf-hinkley-point-deal-radioactive-waste-sparks-anger

EDF's Hinkley Point deal over radioactive waste sparks anger

Expert criticises ministers over refusal to disclose agreement with energy supplier for planned nuclear plant



Groundwork under way in preparation for construction of the new Hinkley Point C power station. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/Rex Shutterstock

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Nuclear waste

Sellafield 'riddled with safety flaws', according to BBC investigation

Panorama programme claims there are numerous, potentially lethal safety flaws at the Cumbria nuclear plant



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Conclusions: destination unknown. Time for urgency or patience?

- Dangers of revisions regarding siting process and planning ‘streamlining’ as a cynical move to bypass the ‘wrong’ decision
- As the incredibly ambitious new build agenda increases so to the speed of finding a site for the repository
- General governance concerns in the UK: *The deep incumbency complex* and speeding up of waste driven by broader nuclear concerns.
- Was the participatory period an anomaly dependent on the lack of a new build programme?

Q1: *Can a suitably democratic process regarding nuclear waste governance be realised during periods of simultaneous intense drives for new nuclear build given that one necessarily links to the other in terms of the ‘Achilles heel’ issue?*

Q2: *On the other hand, is there time to wait given that it could be argued that the dangers of Sellafield and particularly the often forgotten risks of proliferation and terrorist attack outweigh those dangers posed to distant future generations by implementing a GDF?*



UNDERSTANDING THE INTENSITY OF UK POLICY COMMITMENTS TO NUCLEAR POWER

the role of perceived imperatives to maintain military nuclear submarine capabilities

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July 2016

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