



Newsletter

August 1994

NUCLEAR ELECTRIC ARGUES CASE FOR NEW POWER STATIONS

Nuclear Electric has presented its case to the government's Nuclear Review for allowing the moratorium on new power station construction to be lifted.

Its main arguments are:

- Nuclear power is good for the environment because it doesn't produce acid emissions or contribute carbon dioxide to the greenhouse effect.
- The operation of nuclear power has proved itself safe in the UK.
- The economics of nuclear power are improving and it could eventually be as cheap to run as gas, the cheapest option at the moment.

However, the state-owned nuclear company says it will only be able to finance new power stations if it gets certain guarantees. These boil down to continuing government support in the form of security for people who lend money to the company, a guaranteed market for nuclear electricity and a government share in the risk that new regulations could increase its costs. No other part of the electricity industry receives this sort of state support.

Ultimately, NE says it would like to be privatised so that it can operate without the restrictions of a state enterprise. However, to do this it says it would like to be shot of all its irritating liabilities, including the oldest power stations and their waste problems. The government has so far fought shy in public of agreeing to this privatisation, partly because it has other problems on its plate, partly because it would probably be one

of the most difficult industries to sell.

The company says it needs a decision on whether it can build more power stations before the end of 1996, otherwise costs and complications will begin to increase.

Points which the Nuclear Electric statement ignores include:

- No solution has been found to the problem of dealing with the legacy of radioactive waste.
- There are major risks to the public's health and safety from nuclear operations.
- If private sector economics are rigorously applied, nuclear power is likely to prove much more expensive than NE assumes. The company also makes very optimistic assumptions about how well a new nuclear power station will perform.
- There are better and more economic ways to deal with environmental issues like the greenhouse effect, including energy saving and investment in

ACTION PLAN

OBJECT TO MORE NUCLEAR POWER!

Write a letter to the government's Nuclear Review team giving your reasons why there should be no more nuclear power stations built in Britain. Write to: Michael Morgan, Room 2.3.6, Department of Trade and Industry, 1 Palace Street, London SW1E 5HE.

Deadline: Must arrive by September 30th.

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renewable energy sources.

The full NE submission comes in four volumes. A 10 page summary is available from NE at its Barnwood, Gloucestershire headquarters (0452 653839).

HINKLEY C OR SIZEWELL C - WHICH IS THE FAVOURITE?

The Nuclear Electric submission to the government still keeps its options open on which site - Hinkley Point or Sizewell - is the favourite for a new power station.

The company says it really wants to build a larger, twin reactor, and there is room for this on the Suffolk coast. But it has yet to gain planning permission, and a public inquiry is a certainty. It already has planning permission for a single reactor at Hinkley, and this would be "easier to finance". However, the cost of building Hinkley C has now risen, even on NE's estimates, to over £2000 million.

The Hinkley site has the disadvantage that, in order to build a twin reactor, with an output of 2600MW, it would be necessary to reinforce the power lines from Bridgwater to Bristol. This would inevitably involve environmental protests and a further public inquiry.

GREENPEACE Report

GREENPEACE REPORT ON NUCLEAR PROSPECTS

Greenpeace has produced an excellent report - "No case for a special case" - which argues against nuclear power being given special treatment by the government. It also shows why other options, including energy efficiency and the renewables, would be better options. Copies are available from Greenpeace, Canonbury Villas, London N1 2PN (071 354 5100).

HINKLEY POINT NEWS

COMBWICH ROAD RUMPUS

Nuclear Electric has started work on a road skirting round the village of Combwich for which it originally obtained permission at the time of the Hinkley C public inquiry.

The 3/4 mile road was designed to bring in large parts for a prospective PWR station from Combwich wharf on the River Parrett, which is owned by NE. The original plan had been to take the heavy-load vehicles through the main village street. This caused uproar.

Villagers also fear that the same road could be used to take away decommissioned radioactive waste from Hinkley A, when it closes down.

NE has moved now because its planning permission was due to expire at the end of July. It is reportedly going to build a track as opposed to a full-blown tarmac road. The wharf itself is in need of repair, including removing silt from the heavily tidal river bed, before it could be used.

SHE issued a statement accusing the company of "jumping the gun" since Hinkley C doesn't have the government go-ahead, and saying that the exercise would be a "criminal waste of public money". This achieved good publicity in both the Western Daily Press and the Bridgwater Mercury.

MORE RADIOACTIVE WASTE INTO SEA

Increased quantities of radioactive waste could be dumped into the Bristol Channel, if Nuclear Electric is successful in a new application.

The company wants to double the amount of radioactive Sulphur it discharges into the sea because production at Hinkley B power station has increased. It would be too expensive to store the material, the company says.

Although the amounts involved are relatively small, the application is being opposed by both West Somerset District and Somerset County Council health officials, who argued discharges should be kept to a minimum.

HINKLEY HISTORY

The BBC has been contacting workers who helped build the first power station at Hinkley Point for a documentary programme about the nuclear issue. The hour-long programme, looking at nuclear power from Hiroshima to Chernobyl, will be part of a "People's History" series to be broadcast in autumn 1995. Does this mean that Hinkley Point has finally been consigned to history?

Nuclear waste shock

LORRY-LOADS of radioactive waste will be transported across country to Hinkley Point Power Station for incineration, Nuclear Electric has admitted this week.

Government authorisation expected within two to three months will allow the transportation by road of Cobalt-60, Carbon-14, Tritium and other radioactive substances.

In the first year of operation the company anticipates 12 lorry-loads of low-level radioactive waste arriving at the plant from a decommissioned Magnox power station at Trawsfynydd in North Wales.

Nuclear Electric has revealed that an incinerator at Hinkley Point is already being used to burn low-level waste from Oldbury and Berkeley nuclear power stations.

Spokesman Brian Gornall said: "Burning the low-level waste has no effect on the environment.

"The ash in the incinerator is drummed and then goes to the national waste repository in Drigg in Cumbria for burial."

But Richard Bramhall, of the Wales Green Party, said: "Objectors should ask what justification there could be for exposing them to a new and additional hazard.

"A steadily growing body of evidence shows that even tiny amounts of radio-isotopic pollution are a threat to health."

Bridgwater Mercury

July 26th 1994

NUCLEAR NEWS

FIRE AT OLDBURY NUCLEAR SITE

A serious fire during maintenance work at Oldbury nuclear power station, north of Bristol, created considerable publicity in the region in mid-July.

The fire occurred when a spark from welding equipment set alight a tarpaulin being used inside the reactor building. The reactor was shut down at the time. Noone was badly hurt.

SHE was given the opportunity to comment, including pointing out that even small events can have much more serious consequences, and that the accident record at Hinkley has been peppered with similar events. In 1992 a man died at Hinkley from burns received when he was carrying out repairs.

CAMPAIGN NEWS

SIZEWELL PROTEST

Fourteen people occupied the roof of a building at the Sizewell nuclear site in Suffolk for ten hours at the end of May in protest at the nuclear programme.

This was the latest action under the banner of the No Nuclear Compromise group, which is calling for more direct action against nuclear power. More information from Simon Boxer (0392 496303).

Comment on the Nuclear Review from The Economist (April 9th 1994)

"The review may be unwelcome to ministers. But its final conclusion, even more unwelcome to Nuclear Electric, seems inescapable. Britain should stop building new nuclear reactors, and concentrate on cheaper, less controversial alternatives."

SAFE ENERGY NEWS

WIND POWER GETS THUMBS UP

After all the brickbats thrown at wind power in the last 12 months - the turbines are ugly, noisy and a waste of public money - last month's report by the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee came like a breath of fresh air.

The MPs concluded that wind power not only "has the potential to make a significant contribution to national electricity needs", but can be developed "without causing unacceptable visual intrusion, without undue annoyance to local communities and without destroying valued landscapes".

There are already six operating wind farms in Wales, including the largest in Europe - 103 turbines near Llandinam, Powys. The committee envisages that the number of farms could happily double by the end of the century.

A series of myths generated by the recent controversy are dismissed along the way. The report confirms that every unit of wind-powered electricity directly replaces a unit of dirty fossil-fuelled power, thus reducing pollution. Despite its intermittent nature, there are no problems about integrating large numbers of turbines into the national grid.

On cost, it concludes that wind power is not far from being able to survive without an environmental credit.

The committee totally rejects calls for a moratorium on wind farms, spearheaded by the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales, and lays into opposition groups with a vengeance. The CPRW is accused of "errors and exaggeration", for example by claiming that over 14,000 turbines would be needed to match the output of a single coal-fired power station. Friends of the Earth later told the MPs that the same number could produce about 10% of Britain's electricity.

The anti-wind farm group Country Guardian also gets a hammering. It claimed that an entire population of golden eagles in the US state of Montana had been wiped out by colliding with wind turbines. The committee discovered there were no wind farms in Montana. As far as this country is concerned, the MPs say there is "no evidence to suggest that wind turbines need be more dangerous to birds than other structures".

Wind developers do not escape criticism totally. They are said to have sometimes "given every impression of riding roughshod" over local concerns.

SHE has copies of "The Windfarm Debate", a leaflet produced by NATTA, the Open University based group promoting renewable energy systems. Write to the SHE address for a copy.

NEXT SHE COMMITTEE MEETING

Sept. 12th, 7.30pm at 8 The Bartons, Yeabridge, South Petherton (0460 240241 for directions)

SHE, Hockpitt Farm, Nether Stowey, Bridgwater, Somerset TA5 1EX.
0278 732921 (Crispin Atkey)
Membership 0460 240241 (Val Davey)

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