



Committee on Radioactive Waste Management

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Dear Elaine,

CoRWM is tasked to scrutinise the implementation of Government policy on Managing Radioactive Waste Safely. It does this, independently, in the public interest and is accountable to the Governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. To be successful, the MRWS process requires that all parties follow a disciplined engagement from stage to stage, one step at a time. This will ensure that adequate information will be available for each stage of deliberation. If individuals try to anticipate the debates of later stages in the process, prematurely, the deliberations will founder for lack of appropriate evidence that will only be forthcoming in later, stage-specific investigations.

Congratulations on your Winter 2010 Newsletter outlining progress on the MRWS process. CoRWM members have considered the two views presented on page three concerning the question: "Is West Cumbria's Geology Unsuitable?". We would like to take this opportunity to outline CoRWM's position on the views expressed. Our position is informed by our collective understanding of the requirements of the level of detail and quality of geological knowledge that is needed in order to move from the broader considerations of unsuitability, as used in the BGS screening study, to the more specific assessment of potential suitability in MRWS Stage 4. Our position is, therefore, offered in the context of the staged MRWS process and the proposed framework for site identification, which is currently being developed and will be subject to consultation later in 2011.

It is vital to the progress of the MRWS process, and engagement of the Partnership within it, that there is some confidence that potential subsurface sites may exist within West Cumbria. We recognise this and agree that it would be poor use of public resources, as well as community time, effort and capacity, to proceed towards a possible *Decision to Participate* if there was no prospect of potentially suitable sites being identified for subsequent, more detailed, assessment.

Our position is that there is presently no credible scientific case to support the contention that all of West Cumbria is geologically unsuitable.

It is important to recognise that the amount and level of geological information currently available across that part of West Cumbria not excluded by the BGS site-screening report is highly variable. For most of the region, insufficient geological information is available to make an informed decision on whether any sub-area is suitable or not. More work needs to be done on the assessment of existing geological and related information in order to assess potential suitability of different sub-areas prior to the identification of sites for further investigation. Even areas for which considerable geological information is already available will need to be evaluated further using consistent and robust methodologies.

Turning to the two articles on page three of the Newsletter, we consider that it is important to comment on their inaccuracies in order to assist you in assessing their relevance to your work.

Professor Smythe argues that 'scientifically ALL of West Cumbria is unsuitable' and cites this as a conclusion of the 1995-1996 Planning Inquiry. In our view, this was not the case. Reading of the report (Chapter 6: Scientific and Technical Benefits; Subsection 6A: Basic Repository Locational Criteria) and its conclusions (Chapter 8, paragraph 8.42 – Suitability of site) reveals that the Inspector, whilst noting the then current IAEA guidelines, did not at any stage reflect upon or draw conclusions on the suitability or otherwise of West Cumbria *as a whole*. His report, and that of the technical assessor, whilst drawing on evidence and views relating to other parts of West Cumbria, was focused correctly on that small area for which planning approval was sought for construction of an RCF.

Professor Smythe also states that 'the rocks and the underground flow of water are too complex and unpredictable' and claims that the UK is ignoring international guidelines that relate to this. The relevant international guidelines were at the time, and until very recently, contained in IAEA document 111-G-4.1, 1994 "Siting of Geological disposal Facilities" (http://www.pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/Pub952e_web.pdf). These guidelines on site selection (pages 10-11) are explicitly described as *general* guidelines and the IAEA acknowledges that there would be a need to adapt them to site-specific circumstances. These guidelines are, we understand, soon to be superseded by a new set of IAEA guidelines (Geological Disposal of Radioactive Waste [WS-R-4] - <http://www.ns.iaea.org/downloads/standards/drafts/xds334.pdf>), available in draft form.

Alun Ellis, in his statement supporting further geological investigations in West Cumbria, correctly outlines in general terms the process for moving from the BGS Report and non-excluded areas to identification of potential sites. However, we consider that his final statement that groundwater flows and flow paths determined at the Longlands Farm site were consistent with the safe disposal of intermediate-level waste goes too far. We agree, instead, with the more circumspect statement made in the revised and final NDA briefing note of 2nd February 2011. This states that the work that Nirex carried out in 1997 on the Longlands Farm site 'showed groundwater flows and flow paths which Nirex concluded *did not exclude the possibility* of safe disposal'

We trust that you will find these comments helpful in your continued deliberations within the MRWS process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Pickard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dash under the name.

Professor Robert Pickard
Chairman