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14 January 2013

*Dear Eddie,*

#### **MANAGING RADIOACTIVE WASTE SAFELY (MRWS)**

I am grateful for the constructive approach that has been taken throughout the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) process by Cumbria County Council under your leadership.

As you will appreciate, the Geological Disposal Facility for radioactive waste is a project of considerable national importance, and depends on support from potential host communities.

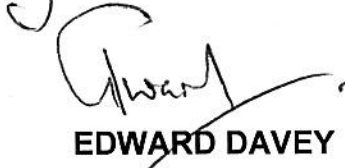
The vote on 30 January is a key one, and follows extensive public engagement through the West Cumbria MRWS Partnership. I am aware that there has been heightened local interest in the MRWS process in recent weeks as the decision approaches and that this has not always been easy to manage.

I would like to reiterate that the Government remains committed to the principle of voluntarism, and that a decision to progress to Stage 4 (the "Decision to Participate") would not remove the right to withdraw from the process. That right remains throughout Stages 4 and 5, with a clear decision point at the end of Stage 5 as to whether to proceed to Stage 6 (underground operations); only at that point would the right to withdraw come to an end. As Baroness Verma said in her letter to you of 19 December, the Government is committed to making the Right of Withdrawal legally binding, and to do this in primary legislation subject to Parliamentary time being available.

A decision to progress to Stage 4 would, however, allow for the first time the process of identifying specific potential sites for the facility to begin. We would also be able to engage in substantive discussions on the package of community benefits, including on the nature of a Community Fund.

I respect the fact that the decision is a matter for your Cabinet. I also acknowledge that it is a difficult decision for you personally, and one which you have given a great deal of thought.

If you or your Cabinet have any concerns about progressing to the next stage which would benefit from further discussion, then I would be happy to meet you before 30 January.

Yours,  
  
**EDWARD DAVEY**