



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

Baroness Verma of Leicester
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

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Eddie Martin and Stewart Young
Leader and Deputy Leader
Cumbria County Council
The Courts
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4th March 2013

Dear Eddie, Stewart

MRWS - Cumbria

Thank you for your letter of 6 February to the Secretary of State, to which I have been asked to reply.

As your Cabinet resolution made clear, Cumbria County Council's decision not to proceed with Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) process means that the existing site selection process for a geological disposal facility has now ended in west Cumbria, despite Allerdale and Copeland Borough Councils voting in favour of proceeding. This is in accordance with the letter on local decision making from former Energy Minister Charles Hendry (November 2011), which established that west Cumbria could only proceed to the next stage of the siting process with a positive decision at both the Borough and County level.

In line with our statement issued on 31 January, the Government remains committed to implementing geological disposal as the means of managing higher activity radioactive waste in the long term, and of proceeding with the MRWS process elsewhere in the country.

In responding, I also feel it is necessary to note there were a range of errors in your letter and to draw attention to some key points in your letter, which I believe betray a misunderstanding of the process and the Government's position. This is all the more surprising given your response to me on 14 January in which you accepted the assurances and commitments the Government had made (my letter to you of 19 December). They also relate to issues that were considered at length by the West Cumbria MRWS Partnership (of which the County was a key member), and published in their comprehensive report last August.

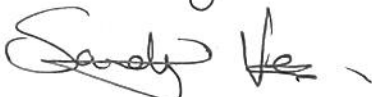
- The Right of Withdrawal had not been enshrined in statute because Councils do not need statutory powers to withdraw from a voluntary process. Nonetheless, at your

request, we undertook to make the Right of Withdrawal statutory, subject to future agreement with local Decision Making Bodies that this was the best option. This form of words was agreed with you in advance.

- In the course of over three years of engagement, the only statistically significant opinion poll undertaken (by Ipsos MORI) showed that 68% of Copeland, 51% of Allerdale, and 50% of the 'rest of Cumbria' (i.e. Cumbria County, minus Copeland and Allerdale) were in favour of proceeding to the next stage of the siting process.
- You argue for a 'twin track' approach to radioactive waste management. We already have a 'twin-track approach', in that we are committed to providing safe interim storage for as long as is necessary to implement geological disposal. As has been made clear on many occasions, we have made record investments in improving interim storage at Sellafield, and this will continue with or without an active MRWS programme in west Cumbria. However, interim storage is not a disposal solution.
- On community benefit, we were clear throughout our discussions with you that the figure available would be substantial and at your specific request we provided clarity of the establishment of a Community Fund. Again, in your response to my letter of 19 December you accepted these assurances.

Although the current site selection process for a geological disposal facility has now ended in west Cumbria, I am keen that we should continue to work together constructively on nuclear decommissioning, and more widely in nuclear and energy policy, in which Cumbria will continue to play an important role. As we renew our efforts to encourage communities across the country to express an interest in the MRWS process, we want to learn the lessons from the experience of the siting process in west Cumbria. To that end I would welcome your considered views.

kindest regards



BARONESS VERMA