



Newsletter June 2015

Austria ready to sue over subsidized nuclear plants

Reuters, Vienna 27 May

Austria will take legal action to block any subsidized nuclear power plants in an effort to discourage use of the technology in Europe and scare off investors, the country's environment minister, Andrae Rupprechter, said in a newspaper interview.

Rupprechter's comments reflect non-nuclear Austria's tough stance, as evidenced by its intent to take the European Commission to court over approval of Britain's plans for the Hinkley Point nuclear plant.

Neighboring Czech Republic also plans to extend its nuclear capacity.

"Should other countries present similar subsidy plans, we will fight these in court," the minister said in the interview published on Wednesday, saying such state backing hindered the rollout of renewable energy technology.

"Giving preference to nuclear power is unacceptable. Nuclear energy is neither safe nor economical. A lawsuit may also make potential investors hesitant."

Locals to get veto over wind farms

Tim Shipman, Political Editor Sunday Times, 17 May

LOCAL residents will be able to block all future onshore wind farms under new measures to be fast-tracked into law, the new energy secretary has announced.

Amber Rudd revealed she had "put a rocket" under her officials to "put the local community back in charge" of their own neighbourhoods.

In an interview with The Sunday Times she also said the Tory government would kick-start a shale gas revolution and loosen rules so it could be extracted from under national parks.

No subsidies will be paid to operators of new onshore wind turbines under legislation to be included in the Queen's speech. The legislation, which Rudd is "hopeful" will be law by the middle

of next year, will ensure that consent for new wind farms will have to be given by a local council planning authority, which will be duty-bound to consult residents. Under current planning rules, big onshore wind farms are handled by a central government national infrastructure body that can ignore the wishes of local people.

Rudd said: "It will mean no more onshore wind farm subsidies and no more onshore wind farms without local community support.

"This is really important. That's going to be one of the first things we're going to do. We're looking to do the primary legislation as soon as we can. Local planning authorities combined with no new subsidies will put local people in charge . . . there will be a much more accountable democratic process."

The 4,000 existing onshore wind turbines produce power for 4m homes. They will remain and 3,000 more with planning permission will be completed, providing power to an extra 3m homes by 2020.

Rudd said she did not personally "think they're an eyesore at all." But she added: "We can't have them on a scale in areas where people don't want them." She added: "We can't aim for having the perfect green community while irritating and upsetting local communities."

She said the government would pass secondary legislation that would allow shale gas extraction under national parks, though drilling will remain banned, meaning the wells would have to be outside areas of groundwater and outstanding natural beauty.

Rudd suggested the government would look again at the compensation for communities affected by fracking, which are currently expected to get an average of £800,000 for each well. "We're determined to get as much as we can out for the local community," she said. "They have to see there's a good reward in it for them."

Rudd also backed nuclear power, declaring it "good for clean energy". And she announced plans to press the big six household energy firms to do more to "keep bills low".

Sellafield nuclear waste storage safety limit relaxed following accident

The Guardian, 14 May

Safety limits on the storage of some of the world's most dangerous nuclear wastes at Sellafield in Cumbria have been relaxed after an accident knocked out a treatment plant.

The government's safety watchdog, the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), has permitted the private company that runs Sellafield to breach legal restrictions on the amount of hot, high-level radioactive waste that can be kept in tanks. The limits are likely to be exceeded by up to 350 tonnes between April 2014 and July 2016.

Critics accused ONR of breaking their promises and putting Sellafield's profits before safety. But ONR insisted there was "minimal hazard increase", while Sellafield said it put safety first.

The waste storage limits, imposed in 2001, were meant to reduce stocks to below 5,500 tonnes of uranium equivalent by July 2015. The aim was to minimise the risk of a disaster spreading a plume of potentially lethal radioactive contamination over the UK and Ireland – officially regarded as Sellafield's "worst credible accident".

The liquid waste comes from Britain's nuclear power stations and generates significant amounts of heat. It has to be constantly cooled and stirred to prevent it from overheating.

Sellafield asked for permission to breach the storage limits to help cope with a backlog caused by an accident in November 2013. A plant meant to solidify the waste to make it safer lost power, suffered "gross contamination" and had to be closed for 11 months.

The alternative to exceeding the storage limits was to temporarily close a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant at Sellafield that separates out the waste. But this would mean operating the plant for two or three years beyond 2018, when it is due to shut for good, placing extra strain on ageing downstream facilities, ONR said.

In a redacted report, ONR accepted that breaching the waste storage limits for 16 months would lead to a "modest increase in hazard". But it concluded that temporarily shutting the reprocessing plant would be more risky, and so has replaced the limits with a weaker "operating rule" administered by Sellafield.

Gordon Thompson, executive director of the US Institute for Resource and Security Studies and an expert on Sellafield, pointed out that the site's liquid high-level wastes were "one of the world's major concentrations of radiological hazard". He accused ONR of breaking a promise made in 2001 to halt reprocessing if necessary to ensure that waste stocks were reduced.

Reprocessing fuel from Britain's newer reactors was "unnecessary, uneconomic, and hazardous," he argued. "It compounds the waste problem, threatens international security, and never should have begun."

Martin Forward, from the local anti-nuclear group, Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment, attacked ONR for "its apparent willingness to put Sellafield's business interests before those of health and safety". Public confidence in the regulator's competence would "sink to an all-time low", he claimed.

Japan to raise worker emergency radiation exposure limits

World Nuclear News, 21 May 2015

Japan's nuclear regulator is to increase the radiation exposure limit for workers in emergency situations from the current 100 millisieverts (mSv) to 250 mSv. The limit was temporarily raised following the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Normally nuclear workers are allowed to receive a dose of 20 mSv per year, although in practice they often receive very much less. If that limit is exceeded in any year, the worker cannot undertake nuclear duties for the remainder.

In emergency circumstances, safety regulators allow workers to receive up to 100 mSv with the same conditions applying, that they must leave the site should that limit be reached. The 100 mSv level is roughly the point at which health effects from radiation become more likely. Below this it is statistically difficult to connect radiation dose to cancer rates, but above this the relationship starts to become apparent.

Under a special allowance, workers at Fukushima Daiichi were permitted doses of up to 250 mSv. That limit was lowered back down to 100 mSv in December 2011. Six workers at Fukushima Daiichi received total doses of over 250 mSv during their time tackling the emergency, while 170 received doses over 100 mSv.

The NRA has now considered the experience at Fukushima Daiichi, as well as overseas standards and scientific studies, and has concluded that permanently raising the limit in emergency situations to 250 mSv is appropriate.

The International Atomic Energy Agency sets 100 mSv as the allowable short-term dose for emergency workers taking vital remedial actions, and 500 mSv as allowable short-term dose for emergency workers taking life-saving actions.

However, the International Commission on Radiation Protection recommends reference levels of 500 to 1000 mSv "to avoid the occurrence of severe deterministic injuries" for rescue workers involved in an emergency exposure situation.

100% Renewables in the South-West is Possible

Stop Hinkley Press Release, 8 May

Stop Hinkley has called on the new Government to raise its ambitions on energy policy and transform the South-West England economy.

“First the new Government needs to recognise that nuclear power is a dead duck. Then it should jump on the local energy revolution bandwagon and draw up plans for a 100% renewable energy system for the South-West by 2050”, said campaign spokesperson Allan Jeffery. *“Such a programme would deliver more jobs, and cheaper energy, at a lower cost and without all the local disruption which Hinkley implies. What are we waiting for?”*

In recent weeks we have learnt that:

- The future of the Hinkley Point C Project is hanging in the balance after details emerged about problems at a similar nuclear plant being built at Flamanville in Normandy. Anomalies have been found in the bottom and lid of the reactor pressure vessel which mean weaknesses in the vital metal structure protecting the outside world from the highly radioactive reactor core. A similar forging technique may have been used for the reactor vessels for Hinkley Point C.
- The two Chinese companies considering investing in Hinkley Point C have serious concerns about the European Pressurised water Reactor (EPR) design, and the financial health of the French company Areva which designed the reactor.
- Areva is now in such a bad state (with a €4.8bn loss in 2014) that it looks as if it might have to withdraw as a co-investor in the Hinkley project.
- Luxembourg is to join Austria in filing a complaint against the UK’s proposed subsidies for Hinkley Point C.
- A German electricity supply company - Greenpeace Energy - has also decided to take legal action against the Hinkley subsidies. A number of municipal energy utilities, such as Stadtwerke Schwäbisch Hall, are considering joining the lawsuit. About 7% of electricity generated in Britain would be highly subsidised nuclear electricity if Hinkley goes ahead thus distorting the European electricity market.
- EDF Energy and the UK Government have a list of problems to sort out which is daunting before the project can go-ahead. For instance they need permission from the European Commission for the financial arrangements to transfer title to the nuclear waste from EDF to the Government in future. EDF’s £10bn loan facility from the Government also needs to be finalised.

- On top of this the Government is seeking European Commission approval to hold a “golden share” in EDF’s £24.5bn Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, which could have the effect of strengthening pending legal challenges against the plant’s construction.

Meanwhile the huge renewable resources available in the South-West are becoming clearer. We have some of the world’s best renewable energy resources, capable of boosting our rural economy and ensuring our energy security. All that is holding us back from the renewable revolution is a failure of political will.

- Regen South West points out that if the Government puts in place the policies needed to meet 15% of the South West’s energy requirements (N.B. Energy, not just electricity, i.e. including heat and transport) this will deliver £10bn of investment and 24,000 jobs. The UK is committed, under EU rules, to meeting a 15% target for energy by 2020.
- At current rates of growth the South-West will only produce just over 14TWh (terawatt hours or billion kWh) of renewable energy whereas it needs to produce 19TWh to meet the 15% target.
- At current rates of growth the number of jobs will be 16,000 by 2020, whereas it could be 34,000.
- The South West region has the renewable energy resources to meet more than 100% of its total energy needs, including replacement of liquid fuels and electrifying railways. We should aim to do this by 2050. According to a recent report by The Resilience Centre the South West has the potential to generate an estimated 68TWh of energy made up of 43TWh of electricity energy, and 25TWh of thermal energy. This equates to just over 100% of total future energy needs for South West assuming a 40% powering down due to energy efficiency measures by 2050.
- A programme to deliver a 100% renewable energy target would create 122,000 jobs. The capital cost of delivering such a programme would be £59,484m, including £8,784m on Smart Grid energy storage. This is 72% of equivalent nuclear costs for delivering the same amount of energy.

“The new Government has a choice – go-ahead with the financial millstone of nuclear power with consumers paying for decades to come with much of the expenditure flowing out of the region, or develop a sustainable energy programme which will boost local jobs and the local economy. We urge them to choose the latter,” said Jeffery

Read the full press release here:

<http://www.stophinkley.org/PressReleases/pr150508.pdf>

Annual General Meeting

The AGM in May had our best turnout for many years. It was good to see so many members, old and new.

The co-ordinating group of Sue, Jo & Allan was re-elected. Val was also re-elected as membership secretary and treasurer. Pete Roche has been very successful as our press officer and will continue in that role supported by local spokespersons.

The date of the next AGM was agreed for May 18th 2016.

If any member would like a copy of the minutes and the reports, please get in touch with Val. If you would like the documents posted, please send an SAE.

Hinkley Archaeology Update

Jo Smoldon, 1 June

Following our interest raised at the EDF Archaeological exhibition in Taunton earlier in the year, Stop Hinkley members attended a talk by Rachael Bellamy of South West Heritage Trust at Neroche Hall, Bickenhall, on 27th May to hear the latest from the archaeological work at Hinkley.

The dig, that could be seen fairly close to the Hinkley Point main gate, revealed an Iron Age semi-port village. Possibly a stream from the Severn estuary which curled round Hinkley gave the position of the village and the Pixie Mound a prominence next to the water. It seems the Hinkley area has been associated with flooding many times in its history as a Roman farm, which the archaeologists revealed was flooded, was then relocated up onto the hill.

The Dark Age cemetery, described as a find of "national importance", of over 250 graves showed they may have been Christian due to the general East West orientation but, because this wasn't strictly consistent, an idea to the slight change in angle may have been because of the different times of year the burials took place.

In the middle of the cemetery area there was a rectangular clearing with no surface burials but a rectangular timber structure, possibly a chapel or church, with burials below it more than one layer under the rectangle. There was a concentration of burials close to the structure in the middle, some were shallow graves 25cm, many being disturbed by subsequent years of ploughing so the precise number of bodies was difficult to determine. Some of the graves were cut into rock which showed tremendous determination to lay the bones to rest in this particular location at Hinkley.

The bones are now, under licence, being tested as to their heritage and EDF will pay for analysis and a report to be made.

For more information and the 30min film shown at the talk:

www.youtube.com/channel/UCgf0BHf5pD9GulfGjbf_3Zg
and www.archaeologyathinkleypoint.wordpress.com

Third anniversary of the Full Moon Vigil at Hinkley Point.

Every month without fail since June 2012 a group of women have held a vigil at the gates of Hinkley Point. They have stayed overnight, come rain or come shine. We would like to thank them



for their support and for maintaining that presence every month. They create a very visible presence with their flags, music and other activities and are popular with the workers, the security staff and the nuclear police. So Happy Anniversary to all the women of Witch Watch.

Events

Stop Hinkley meetings
Mondays 15 June & 20 July at 7pm
West Bow House, Milton Place
Off West Street, Bridgwater

If you are planning on coming, please let us know so we can let you know if there is any change of plan.

Green Scythe Fair

Sunday 14 June, <http://www.greenfair.org.uk/>
Thorney Lakes, Muchelney TA10 0DW
Jo will be manning the Stop Hinkley stand

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