

*Royal Ministry of the Environment
The Minister*

Rt Hon David Miliband
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs
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Recently, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) published a strategy on decommissioning and cleaning up of UK's nuclear sites, including Sellafield. This strategy was presented to me by the NDA at a meeting in Oslo on the 11th of May. I found it very useful to discuss directly with the NDA how the UK will tackle the clean-up at Sellafield and the rest of its historic 60-years nuclear legacy.

As a neighbouring country, Norway has a strong interest in all nuclear activities and facilities that might affect Norwegian land or waters through regular or accidental releases of radioactivity. In this context, UK's plans for future operation and decommissioning of the THORP reprocessing facility at Sellafield is of particular interest. We consider the operation of THORP, and in particular the production and accumulation of liquid High Level Waste from this facility, as the main source within the UK of hazards which could result in accidental releases leading to radioactive pollution of Norwegian land and waters.

During their visit in Oslo, NDA confirmed that there are no plans to continue reprocessing at the THORP plant at Sellafield after the end of current reprocessing contracts in 2010. It was, however, very disappointing to hear that NDA has advised the UK Government to re-open THORP, which is currently shut down following a major leak reported in April 2005.

The possible reopening of THORP in the near future has led to a growing concern among the Norwegian public. Considering THORP's poor safety record and recent history of incidents, combined with the large volumes of liquid High Level Waste stored on site, my Government do indeed share this concern. Our reasons for concern are underscored by the UK Health and Safety Executive's decision to prosecute BNG Sellafield following the leak reported in April 2005 due to breach of safety regulations.

Reduction of high hazards is claimed to be the key focus of NDA's strategy for clean-up of UK's nuclear sites. This would mean that the highest hazards are tackled first. The key issue of hazard reduction, according to NDA's strategy, is to immobilize the 85% of the radioactive

waste which is stored in an untreated form and is potentially mobile. Among this untreated waste, the most significant hazard is no doubt the large volumes of liquid High Level Waste from reprocessing activities stored at the Sellafield site. Continued reprocessing at THORP would lead to further production and accumulation of high level waste, and would be a contribution to increased and prolonged hazards, rather than hazard reduction.

In light of this, it is hard to see how reopening of THORP could be compatible with a clean-up strategy giving priority to high hazards. Before you make your final decision, therefore, I would urge you to take the interests of neighbouring countries such as Norway into due account, and to reconsider the reopening of THORP in light of the hazards involved.

Yours sincerely

Helen Bjørnøy