

Nuclear Decommissioning Authority – Context

Introduction

The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) is a non-departmental public body responsible for the clean-up and decommissioning of publically owned civil nuclear sites. The Authority was established on 1st April 2004 and gets its statutory responsibilities and authorities via the Energy Act 2004.

The NDA's host government department is Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), but also maintains direct links with HM Treasury and UK Government Investments (UKGI) given its substantial budget and influence in the UK nuclear industry.

The NDA's annual spending limits are set by parliament, combining government grant with income from our commercial activities. The NDA's current annual budget is around £3bn with a projected lifetime costs of completing the clean-up and decommissioning mission of £117bn spread across the next 120 years.

The UK nuclear industry dates from the Cold War arms race that began in the post-war 1940s, when the focus was on producing material for nuclear weapons. From 1956 onwards the UK's first nuclear power stations began generating electricity for homes and businesses. Fuel reprocessing and fabrication plants were built from the 1970s -1990s and are still operation today.

After operations end, the radioactive material must be removed before the nuclear facilities are taken apart. The site is then cleared and the land returned for future use. This is decommissioning.

NDA Estate

Shortly after its establishment the assets and liabilities of both British Nuclear Fuels Ltd and the UK Atomic Energy Authority were transferred into the ownership of the NDA on behalf of the Government. This included 17 sites around the country: the original "cold war", waste management and reprocessing facilities at Sellafield, the first generations of nuclear power stations, a number of research sites and the low level nuclear waste repository close to the village of Drigg in West Cumbria.

The NDA also owns a small group of subsidiary companies who provide specialist services to the industry.

Throughout their lifetime the two NDA owned sites in Cumbria, Sellafield and the Low Level Waste Authority have provided support and expert services to the remainder of the UK nuclear industry, and will continue to do so for many years. They are both of strategic national importance within the overall context of the industry.

Acknowledging both the importance and dominance of the two Cumbrian sites within clean-up and decommissioning mission the Government established the NDA Headquarters in Cumbria, with its head office at Westlakes Science & Technology Estate, just south of Whitehaven and close to both Sellafield and the Low Level Waste Repository sites.

The NDA also a number of smaller offices at Birchwood close to Warrington, Caithness and in central London.

Site Governance

Whilst the NDA owns the sites and the wide range of facilities and materials thereon, the sites are managed and operated on behalf of the NDA by a small number of site licence companies (SLC), who have the primary relationship with the regulators.

Budgets and work programmes are agreed, but activity on site is the responsibility of the SLCs. Different ownership models of those companies exist based on the nature of their activity.

Nuclear Waste Management Policy

Under the terms of the Energy Act 2004 the NDA is required to produce a Strategy every 5 years which is agreed by UK and Scottish Ministers and formally laid before both Parliaments. This Strategy describes the high level approach to delivering the mission. To secure implementation of the Strategy through site programmes, our strategic requirements are translated into Site Strategic Specifications which detail what Strategy means for each site, this is then become embedded in the site's lifetime plans.

The NDA's Strategy includes 5 themes under which all activities are grouped, and brings a clear focus and understanding of the relationships between the different aspects of the mission. They are:

- Site Decommissioning & Remediation
- Spent Fuel Management
- Nuclear Materials
- Integrated Waste Management
- Critical Enablers.

Whilst all have relevance to the Cumbria Minerals & Waste Local Plan of key interest are:

- Site Decommissioning and Remediation – the approach to decommissioning redundant facilities and managing land quality
- Spent Fuel Management – the approach to managing the diverse range of spent nuclear fuels
- Integrated Waste Management – how we manage all forms of waste arising from the operating and decommissioning our sites, including waste retrieved from legacy facilities.

To ensure the delivery of the UK devolved administration's policies the overall approach to safely and securely manage radioactive waste is to dispose of it where possible, or place it in safe, secure suitable storage.

To deliver that requirement, new facilities may be required or adjustments made to existing facilities on sites. These in turn may require planning approval on existing planning conditions to be revised. As Operator's of the Cumbrian sites, Sellafield Ltd and LLWR Ltd are responsible for securing those approvals, and will act as planning applicant.