

To the Editor
Independent on Sunday

Letter for Publication re 17th June 2007 article 'UK lumbered with foreign nuclear waste'

Sir

As the owners of the Sellafield site which includes the THORP reprocessing plant we might reasonably have expected that you would reflect the views of the NDA, or our site contractor, on the future of THORP in last week's article 'UK lumbered with foreign nuclear waste' 17th June. Furthermore, you might have given us the opportunity to express some of the arguments in support of the principle of advance allocation of nuclear materials to overseas customers as set out in the Government's recently published consultation.

As you did neither we would wish to make the following points to bring some much needed balance to your reporting on this issue.

Our contractor is focused on getting THORP operational again. The plant is undergoing a phased restart and much of the plant is now ready for operation. In fact, it is currently being prepared to start shearing a limited amount of spent fuel as part of this process.

The necessary approval has been obtained from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to restart the plant and we anticipate a return to full operation once the separate but related issue of downstream evaporator capacity has been successfully addressed.

Therefore, your suggestion that in consulting on advance allocation of nuclear materials the Government is somehow 'preparing the ground for the permanent closure of THORP' is well wide of the mark.

Full details of the advance allocation proposal can be found on the DTI web site or via the NDA's site www.nda.gov.uk. However, put simply, advance allocation would mean that where it is beneficial to do so the UK can fulfil overseas customer contracts for the return of their materials in advance of reprocessing by allocating the equivalent material from the existing stockpile of UK-owned material. As is clearly stated in the consultation document, it is still intended to reprocess overseas customers' fuel and as such there would be no net increase in the stocks of nuclear materials or waste held in the UK.

We have proposed advance allocation because we believe; it will permit the timely repatriation of the products of reprocessing to overseas customers; has a broadly neutral environmental impact; and, could deliver income to off-set the costs of decommissioning. The DTI has said it will consider all views before deciding whether this is in the UK's interests.

Yours faithfully

JON PHILLIPS
Communications Director
Nuclear Decommissioning Authority