

All Party Parliamentary Group On Nuclear Energy
Annual General Meeting
27 January 2005, 10:30 am
Committee Room 6, House of Commons

Attendees:

Bill Tynan MP - Chair	Helen Liddell MP
Rt Hon Lord Jenkin of Roding, Vice Chair	Bill Olnier MP
Bill Tynan MP, Chair	Keith Parker, NIA
David Drew MP, Secretary	Gordon Lee
Lord Jenkin of Roding, Vice Chair	Andrew Miller MP
Peter Bottomley MP	Lord Oxburgh
Tam Dalyell MP	John Robertson MP
Paul Fleming, BNFL	Dipesh Shah, UKAEA
Lord Howarth	Beth Taylor, UKAEA
Simon James, NIA	Lord Ullswater
Miranda Kirschel, All Party Group	Lord Walker

1. Voting for Officers

A proposal was moved by Andrew Miller MP that the existing officers should be reappointed for the coming year. This was seconded by John Robertson MP, and agreed by the meeting. The Officers of the Group remain as follows:

Chairman: Bill Tynan MP
Secretary: David Drew MP
Vice Chairmen: Lord Christopher, Lord Jenkin of Roding, Lord McNally
Treasurer: Jimmy Hood MP

2. Presentation by Mr Dipesh Shah, Chief Executive, UKAEA

Mr Shah gave an account of UKAEA's accomplishments: they have been leaders in the field of research reactors and are now becoming leaders in decommissioning and environmental restoration. They are already the decommissioning leaders in Europe, decommissioning 14 of the 26 inherited research reactors in Europe, including Gleep which was fully decommissioned last year. They have been experts in nuclear research for the past 50 years in all types of research reactors constructed to date.

Many other companies have been 'spun off' from UKAEA, including Amersham International, AEA Technology, AWE, and BNFL. The next phase of the journey is the massive restructuring which is now taking place in preparation for the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. UKAEA are also now preparing for the competition which the NDA will soon be implementing across its nuclear licensed sites.

Mr Shah is in the process of re-inventing the company: they have just completed the installation of a completely new software system which will enable them to run the organisation in a completely integrated way. They intend to cut the planned timescales for decommissioning by 35 years, which in turn will bring down the cost of the projects.

The larger part of the cost arises from the care and maintenance of the site, so they intend to reduce the timescale for care and maintenance. The original timescales included a period in which levels of radioactivity could decay, whereas with new methods of treatment and newly developed equipment this will not be necessary. The material can be packaged and stored without delay. Through capacity integration, fewer stores and innovation the company is bringing down the ultimate timeframe and costs. UKAEA are also setting performance criteria and competition on the sites to incentivise excellence.

The next step is for plans to be finalised and be submitted to Ministers for approval. There will be a bid for sites and they have ambitions to be involved in more of the tier 2 and 3 work with the arrival of the NDA. UKAEA's main competitors in business will be companies such as Areva and BNFL in Europe and companies such as Bechtel, Fluor, Jacobs and Washington Group from the USA. They would however like to broaden the business by expanding into environmental restoration beyond the boundaries of nuclear decommissioning.

On the subject of UKAEA's work with the fusion reactor at Jet in Culham, Mr Shah is confident that the company can fast-track into industrialisation before 2030. The plasma physics is now well understood; obstacles lie mainly with the engineering side, in terms of the challenge of industrialising and commercialising the technology. There were concerns among the group of a lack of availability of materials required for the new technology to be commissioned, and Mr Shah explained that UKAEA is working on industrial partnerships and investigating materials which could perform more efficiently in the extreme temperature, A fusion reactor creates heat ten times the temperature of the sun and therefore needs to be encased in walls which do not constantly erode from the heat. Once these obstacles are overcome, fusion can provide a clean new, potentially inexhaustible source of energy for the future.

On the subject of government policy, Mr Shah supports the development of nuclear, renewables and improvements in energy efficiency as the means of tackling the issues of climate change and security of supply. Mr Shah feels that 'nuclear versus renewables' is a sterile debate.

The members of the group were interested in the types of professional skills UKAEA will be looking to recruit. These range from safety management, high hazard environmental licensing, regeneration, dealing with local planning authorities, and the company has already begun recruiting and training professionals to fill positions. There will be long-term roles in a variety of disciplines in decontamination, decommissioning and environmental restoration.