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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

HSC Coordinated programme of Nuclear Safety Research Advice from NuSAC on programme for 2005/06 Note from the Chair of NuSAC Sub Committee of Research

Board member lead: Dr M Weightman

Issue

1. I am submitting this note in fulfilment of the Nuclear Safety Advisory Committee's (NuSAC's) remit to consider and offer the Commission advice on the HSE's proposals for the HSC Co-ordinated Programme of Nuclear Safety Research for 2005/2006, set out in paper HSC/05/39. This advice is based primarily on the work of the NuSAC Sub-committee on Research (SCR).

Timing

2. Commission approval of the proposed 2005/06 programme is required to enable the HSE to commission levy funded research.

Recommendation

3. The HSC is advised by NuSAC to approve the HSC Coordinated Programme of Nuclear Safety Research for 2005/06 put forward in paper HSC/05/39.

Background

4. The HSC Coordinated programme of Nuclear Safety Research is overseen by HSE on behalf of HSC, under guidelines from DTI (published on the HSE website). It covers civil reactors operated by British Energy and Magnox Electric, and sites under the new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, operated by BNFL and UKAEA. These NDA licensee research arrangements cover Sellafield and the operating and decommissioning Magnox sites, and are currently being developed with UKAEA.

5. The sub-committee met with HSE, the relevant licensees and other stakeholders in April 2005 to discuss the current and proposed programmes. HSE's proposal to HSC is contained in paper HSC/05/39.

Argument

6. HSE presented the proposed programme for 2005/2006 to the NuSAC SCR. For reactor safety research this comprised Levy and Licensee programmes totalling £5.2M, excluding management charges. (The cost of Sellafield licensee chemical plant research was not presented.) HSE advised that it is satisfied that the proposed Levy and Licensee programmes will:

- deliver a balanced and adequate programme of research that addresses priority reactor Nuclear Research Index issues and the Sellafield chemical plant safety research strategies (HSE's yardsticks);
- maintain the licensees' access to Essential Research Capability and HSE's access to Independent Technical Capability
- include participation in appropriate international activities.

7. HSE advised that there had been late BE management reviews of all expenditure that had resulted in reductions in the BE strategic programme, affecting the HSC nuclear safety research programme for 04-05 and 05-06. HSE advised that the changes did not lead to an unacceptable reduction of nuclear safety, although they were concerned that previously agreed procedures for requesting modifications to the programme had not been followed. There had also been a late management review of the Magnox 05-06 programme, leading to a small reduction that was still under discussion between HSE and Magnox.

8. NuSAC SCR recognises the extensive dialogues which have led to the proposed programme and advises HSC that the programme is well focused on the technical needs and should be approved. This is the third annual programme under the new arrangements, and the SCR notes that these arrangements continue to work well.

9. NuSAC SCR is disappointed that since the introduction of the new research arrangements the continuing financial situation of BE continues to adversely affect the nuclear safety research programme. It notes a continued downward trend in the cost of the programme and is concerned about the increasing commercial pressures on safety research.

10. NuSAC SCR considers that the research needs for decommissioning plant are not significantly less than for operating plant. It is also concerned about the potential effect of commercial pressures on safety research for decommissioning plant, and there is unease caused by uncertainty arising from the effect on the research programme of the introduction of the NDA, as there was about the effect of any new system.

11. NuSAC SCR is also disappointed that in recent years the agreed programme has led to a reduced outturn, as resources were diverted to other issues. Nevertheless it accepts that the timescales for research issues are often long and work can be deferred without unacceptable safety consequences, and notes that if HSE judges that the consequences are unacceptable, it can use its regulatory powers.

Consultation

12. NuSAC SCR discussed the proposed programme on 14th April 2005 with HSE and the Licensees. NuSAC SCR had previously seen the reactor Nuclear Research Index and the Sellafield Chemical Plant research strategies which were a major part of the drivers behind the programmes. They have also recently discussed the new arrangements for reactor and Sellafield nuclear safety research. Participation at the SCR meetings includes MOD, DTI, NDA, BE, Magnox Electric, BNFL Sellafield and UKAEA.

Presentation

13. HSE has its own communications strategy. NuSAC SCR papers and minutes are mainly open, and they are placed on the HSE website as far as they are open.

Costs and Benefits

14. The proposed programmed expenditure in 2005/2006 is £928k for the HSE programme and £4263k for the BE/Magnox programme plus management charges of £225k for the HSE.

15. HSE and Licensees' evaluations of the programme conclude that the HSC Co-ordinated Programme of Nuclear Safety Research is satisfactorily progressing Nuclear Research Index issues and contributes to securing high standards of nuclear safety.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

16. The cost of the research commissioned by HSE and the programme management charges are recovered by a levy on the reactor Licensees. HSE also needs the staff to oversee the total programme and act as Project Officers for the Levy Programme.

Other implications

17. N/A

Next steps

18. NuSAC SCR recommends the approval of the HSC Coordinated Programme of Nuclear Research for 2005/06 put forward in paper HSC/05/39. It has some reservations that are recorded above, but these do not prevent an overall positive recommendation.