

**NUCLEAR WASTE DISCHARGES TO THE
MARINE ENVIRONMENT**

**Lodged au Greffe on 19th May 1998
by Senator S. Syvret**



STATES OF JERSEY

STATES GREFFE

175

1998

P.106

Price code : A

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion -

- (a) to express their disapproval of the discharging of nuclear waste into the marine environment and the atmosphere from the nuclear reprocessing plant at La Hague, Normandy;
- (b) to request the Bailiff to advise the Secretary of State of their views and to request Her Majesty's Government to communicate their views formally to the Government of the French Republic;
- (c) to express their support for the draft OSPAR Objective with Regard to Radioactive Substances, -

''continuously reduce discharges, emissions and losses of radioactive substances, with the ultimate aim of concentrations in the environment near background values.''

and to request the Bailiff to advise the Secretary of State that the Assembly wishes Her Majesty's Government to take these views into account in its submissions to the forthcoming ministerial meeting of the OSPAR Commission member states.

SENATOR S. SYVRET

Report

The nuclear reprocessing plant at la Hague imports and treats nuclear waste from many different nations. In theory the purpose of reprocessing is to recover unused uranium and plutonium from spent nuclear fuel so that it can be reused. But in practice this rarely occurs. The world's two largest commercial nuclear reprocessing factories - Sellafield and La Hague are in reality little more than nuclear waste dumps used by other nations to avoid having to deal with their own nuclear waste at home.

Reprocessing is an inherently dirty operation. Many times the original volume of waste is produced including a large amount of gaseous and liquid waste which is simply discharged to the environment. It is important to note that reprocessing plants produce many times more radioactive pollution than nuclear power stations. For example the three nuclear reprocessing plants in Europe - Sellafield, Dounreay and La Hague - are responsible for 97 per cent of the radioactive discharges to the marine environment of northern Europe. In just over 30 years the reprocessing plants of the United Kingdom and France will discharge as much radioactivity as released by Chernobyl.

The reprocessing plant at La Hague is the single largest contributor of radiation in western Europe. Its operators - COGEMA - have recently opened up two new plants, UP2-800 in 1994, and UP3 in 1989, increasing La Hague's reprocessing capacity from 400 tonnes a year to a total of 1,600. Between 1989 and 1995, radiation in La Hague's discharges increased five-fold.

Whilst there may be debate about the degree of risk to human health posed by these discharges, it is generally accepted that there is no such thing as a safe level of exposure to radiation. Given that recent research, now confirmed by the French government, has identified an increase in childhood leukaemia in the La Hague region it would appear both reasonable and prudent to regard the activities of the La Hague reprocessing plant as a potential health risk to islanders.

The people of the Channel islands gain zero benefit from the operations at La Hague yet we share the risk. Given these circumstances I do not believe that we should remain silent.

Radioactive discharges to the marine environment from land-based sources are controlled by the OSPAR Commission, whose member states are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the European Union. In 1992 the OSPAR Convention recognised the ‘‘Need to reduce radioactive discharges from nuclear installations to the marine environment.’’

The forthcoming meeting of the OSPAR Commission will consider adopting a new objective, the text of which I have quoted in part (c) of the proposition. A number of countries including Denmark, Belgium, Iceland, Ireland and Norway have already endorsed the new clause and it is expected that others will follow.

We in Jersey have no foreign policy voice of our own, constitutionally the Government of the United Kingdom deals with all such matters on our behalf. We cannot express our concerns directly to the OSPAR Commission but we can let our opinion be known to the United Kingdom authorities. Given that the people of Jersey gain no benefit from the activities of La Hague yet share in the risk I believe the least we can do is express our opinion on the matter.