A Re-run of Nirex so the Gravy Train can Continue Unabated?

Copeland Councillors, encouraged by the many ex-Sellafield staff, other pro-nuclear, politicians, individuals and quangos, are in the process of misleading the public re. the history of the Nirex Inquiry so that their plans for the area to host to a nuclear dump underground can go ahead – simultaneously bolstering the proposed new nuclear developments at the Sellafield site.

In the 1990s, work was carried out by Nirex on behalf of Sellafield and BNF to assess the suitability of the area for developing an underground storage facility (dump) for the increasing and embarrassing stock of nuclear waste for which no home could be found.

Nirex in fact studied the whole U.K., both in the 1970s and 80s. Of a total of 537 sites, 9 sites in Cumbria made it to the short list. West Cumbria, in its entirety, was thoroughly examined.

Firstly, an explanation of some of the jargon. Cumbria, for the purposes of the investigation was divided into four REGIONS. The one that concerns the present attempts is the one bounded by Workington, Barrow, Ulverston and Keswick. It includes off-shore territory between 10 and 15 km from the shore.

Current plans relate to a specific DISTRICT within that REGION: the one from Whitehaven down to Ravenglass, and extending to between 10 and 15 km inland and off-shore.

Within the DISTRICT is the SITE - a rectangle of about 55 sq km centred on Longlands Farm, including Sellafield site, Seascale, and Gosforth.

The POTENTIAL REPOSITORY ZONE (in keeping with the current nuke-speak, now reduced to PRZ,) comprises the comparatively small area around Longlands Farm.

The application was eventually kicked out by the planning inspector. Apart from many other considerations, the Inquiry found that there were fundamental flaws in the geology and hydrology of the whole REGION. (Not just the SITE or the DISTRICT.) Incidentally, it is understood that the adjudicators also felt that the application was a “Trojan Horse”, in that it was merely the precursor to a full dump for intermediate level waste. How prescient they were.

We believe that the current demand by the nuclear industry for expansion is forcing the industry to find a means of disposal of the waste – their Achilles heel. By misinforming people they are pushing for something that could be highly dangerous, but will produce the desired result for the industry in the short-term. Naturally, previous conduct confirms that this is the manner in which they work.

Interestingly, it seems that the whole of the old Nirex documentation has now been removed from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority’s website.
Local pro-nuclear lobbyists suggest that the fact that Copeland and Allerdale have volunteered should be considered an over-riding factor. They also suggest that there is no reason why the area should be considered any different from other areas of the UK that make an expression of interest. We would comment that, firstly, the individuals of Gosforth and other affected communities have not been approached to obtain their views. The only views considered thus far are those of the (largely) pro-nuclear politicians and their cohorts.

Secondly, no matter that an expression of interest has been issued, it does not change the fact that the REGION has already been subjected to intensive survey and found to be an unsuitable location for such a dump. The thorough investigation, costing £400 million, by NIREX, demonstrates that. Despite the current suggestions that “better, more modern techniques” could be employed, no new investigations have taken place since the NIREX inquiry was stopped. Just as importantly, no-one has sought to demonstrate that the findings were in any way incorrect. Even the methods listed by the current supporters, such as 3D surveying, are no different to those which were utilised for the NIREX assessment.

Even if the local people truly are willing, world-wide scientific principles would prohibit the development of an underground dump - given the current knowledge of the geology. Remember that NIREX were only concerning themselves with legacy waste – not the future waste, and had no expectations of the high level waste proposals of today. The kind of reactors that have recently received blanket (i.e. generic, non-site specific – one size fits all) design approval will result in waste with far higher levels of radioactivity than the current designs. These more toxic wastes are being incorporated in the current proposals.

Copeland and Allerdale councils have now had sufficient experience to recognise that the nuclear industry is an ally distinctly lacking in integrity. Far from pushing for these vested interests, they should be protecting the best interests of the REGION and its populace. It is noteworthy that not one other council has put forward an expression of interest. The government has not sought alternative regions, districts, or sites, for nuclear waste disposal.

It appears that the government is, for whatever reasons, manipulating the system to the benefit, primarily, of Sellafield by removing planning appeals, and accepting volunteerism as an over-riding factor.

All those involved, Sellafield management, Copeland and Allerdale councillors, politicians and the government must know that the NIREX Inquiry was right. It seems they are still determined to force this dangerous and destructive development on residents.

It is puzzling how a comparatively new government can have become so pro-nuclear in such a short time. We know the last government had interests and were already going down the same line, but how can so many people be so adamant that something so obviously wrong may eventually be right? A truly interesting conundrum, to which money seems to be the only key.