

DISCUSSIONS OF RECOMMENDATION GROUP 7

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ABSTRACT

Recommendation Group 7 worked on expertise, the site selection process and compensation.

At the local level, there is a need for access to independent wide ranging areas of expertise. The funding of this expertise should come through a clearing house mechanism but be spent transparently, as locally agreed. There should be a clear communication strategy implemented at the local level.

The decision making process for site selection should be transparent and structured in a series of stages with clear criteria defined. Methods should be reviewed before focussing on sites. A number of sites should be considered initially with local stakeholders involved from the outset. Trust is an important factor. Therefore the process should appear to be fair to all stakeholders. The purpose and objectives should be clear in order to avoid suspicion of a 'Trojan Horse'. Rock characterisation facilities are very expensive and therefore should only be developed at likely repository sites to confirm strong candidates.

Compensation is a difficult issue and needs to be faced. It needs to be linked with sustainable development of the region.

TOPICS

The COWAM approach was to identify 4 discussion topics from the issues raised at the first seminar in Oskarshamn. Eight Recommendation Groups were then formed and each one was asked to discuss two topics at the three subsequent seminars (Verdun, Wellenberg and Cordoba). The topics chosen for Recommendation Group 7 were:

Topic 2. Expertise in the local decision-making process

Topic 3. The site selection process

The Recommendation Groups were also free to identify other issues that they wished to discuss and in the course of the discussions Recommendation Group 7 decided that the question of compensation was an issue that they also wanted to consider.

A framing paper was provided at the Verdun seminar that contained a list of questions to be used as a starting point for the discussions of the Recommendation Groups. Recommendation Group 7 met three times (at the Verdun, Wellenberg and Cordoba seminars) to consider these questions, to debate the issues and to work towards agreed recommendations. The following report was agreed as a summary of the main issues and conclusions arising from the discussions of the Group.

TOPIC 2 : EXPERTISE IN THE LOCAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The Recommendation Group agreed that local stakeholder engagement should be defined by a nationally agreed framework. The stakeholders on the local and regional level need access to many types of expertise to complement the existing expertise within the group. This expertise is not just technical expertise but includes socio-economic, legal, public health, environmental and decision making expertise. This is important as it contributes to local stakeholder independence and aids empowerment. The Recommendation Group felt that it was important that social and economic issues should be taken into account in the decision making process, not just technical issues. Experience at MONA shows that it is difficult to get social issues discussed and this may be partly due to the lack of suitable experts and partly due to the emphasis on technical issues.

Therefore the local stakeholders need to find specialists and need funding to enable this to happen. The Recommendation Group agreed that the source of funding should not come directly from the operator or organisation dealing with the waste but through a clearing house mechanism; examples are in Sweden where the money comes from a waste management fund and in France where the CLIS is government funded. The way money is used should be agreed among the local stakeholders in accordance with nationally agreed principles. The Group felt that a good way forward was to set up a special organisation mandated by the group of local stakeholders whose job is to scrutinise the waste management decision making process. The organisation should be well defined, with representatives from all interested parties,

although they need not be elected representatives. It is important that the way in which the funds are used should be transparent. Examples of such organisations are the Oskarshamn and Östhammar reference groups for feasibility studies and MONA/STOLA/PALOFF. These groups can use the funds to hire experts to advise them and it is important that they include experts from opposition groups as well as supporting groups so that a healthy debate can occur.

The Recommendation Group felt that it was important that the organisation held regular debates and disseminated information. In order to do this the Group suggested that they should develop a communication strategy that could include a forum every few months or so, leaflets containing information agreed at the forum, and use other means of communication eg newsletter, website, and providing information at local events. Examples are the communication methods used by MONA/STOLA.

The Recommendation Group felt that it is often difficult to find independent experts in their own country, so the solution is to find experts from other countries that have the appropriate knowledge. In the UK, in the 1990s, a safety expert was invited from the US because UK experts were all involved in the preparation of the safety case. Similarly, in Sweden, when the municipality of Arjeplog was to decide if it should use the veto against uranium mining in 1981 a hearing was organised with invited experts. The proponents and opponents agreed to invite a "neutral" expert from abroad, Joseph Wagoner, a working health expert from the USA. He also made a written statement.

TOPIC 3 THE SITE SELECTION PROCESS

The Recommendation Group felt that the decision making process should be transparent and structured in a series of steps or stages. Criteria for go/nogo decisions should be defined in advance for each step and there is a need for clear and definite alternatives if the application fails; an example is the new German approach proposed by Akend. The Group felt that peer review of the criteria would lend confidence in them. The process should begin with a review of methods of waste management before focussing in on identifying sites appropriate to any one method, as now proposed in the restarted UK programme. The process should be acknowledged as being fair by the potential stakeholders.

It is clear that people believe that any site is a potential site once it appears on the initial selection list, even if this is clearly the start of a long site selection process. Therefore the Recommendation Group felt that it is important to start with more than one site on the list and to involve local actors from the beginning by raising the question nationally first.

One issue of concern is the generally held suspicion that a site originally selected for LLW disposal may quietly become the site for ILW and HLW also. Therefore, the Recommendation Group felt that it is important that the type of waste that will be disposed of at the site is clearly defined at the outset, at the start of the site selection process. Similar concerns apply to the waste management concept e.g. will it change from laboratory to disposal site, or from storage to disposal? In UK and Belgium it was felt that the rock characterisation facility was a 'Trojan Horse'.

Trust is an important factor. Reliability, responsibility and fairness are attributes that foster trust between the participants in the decision making process. Sometimes this may involve difficult decisions and require determination to follow up alternatives in the face of opposition. However, if this does not happen, then trust is destroyed and the local community feels betrayed and victimised. Once this occurs, then it is difficult to build up confidence in the decision making process. Examples are Bure in France and Wellenberg in Switzerland.

It is important that the information should be freely available and transparent, and that understandable language should be used wherever possible. This applies equally to the company proposing the repository, the opposition groups and the government. The way that information is exchanged should follow an agreed and fair process.

Appropriate investigations should be agreed, for example to ensure long term safety is demonstrated. This may be through borehole programmes and a rock characterisation facility, where appropriate. It should be made clear to all stakeholders what purpose is envisaged in each case: is it generic investigation or characterisation of a proposed site?

A rock characterisation facility is a good way to obtain more data on a potential site, however it is very expensive. Hence the Recommendation Group was concerned that there was a possibility that money could be wasted if too many rock characterisation facilities were set up or if they were set up at sites that could not be repository sites. The Group agreed that if a rock characterisation facility is to be set up to obtain data and perform research on the characterisation of a possible site, then it should be clearly understood from the very start that if the research showed that the site was acceptable then the repository could indeed be sited there. The Group is not aware of any examples in Europe.

EXTRA TOPIC: COMPENSATION

Compensation is a difficult issue and needs to be faced. The Recommendation Group felt that since a repository was a long term feature it was important to consider the needs of future generations as well as those of the current generation. The Group agreed that it is important that compensation is not linked with bribery and therefore it should have a different basis. The Group liked the German vision of compensation in which the development of a repository at that location should be a positive idea linked in with the future and long term sustainable development of the region as a whole. Therefore local stakeholders should be consulted on their view of the future of the region; for example MONA/STOLA have a specific working group on local development to address the issue of development of the region. In addition, local stakeholders will need to participate in and have control over the way in which the repository develops. One suggestion from Germany is to link the repository in with the development of a centre of excellence and hence the local community should be able to develop pride in the development of a national facility. Therefore there needs to be a good vision for the region, one that will get support because it is of benefit to the nation and the local economy.