



NUCLEAR WASTE
MANAGEMENT
ORGANIZATION

SOCIÉTÉ DE GESTION
DES DÉCHETS
NUCLÉAIRES

Implementing Adaptive Phased Management 2011 to 2015



What We Heard – Comments Received
about *DRAFT PLAN*

JUNE 2011



Introduction

Every year since 2007 when the Government of Canada selected Adaptive Phased Management as the preferred approach for the safe long-term management of Canada's used nuclear fuel, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) has published a five-year strategic plan. Titled *Implementing Adaptive Phased Management*, the Plan describes how the NWMO will implement Adaptive Phased Management in the planning period. The NWMO invites all interested individuals and organizations to get involved in the long-term management of used nuclear fuel. To encourage public review and comment, the Plan is distributed by mail to 2,500 individuals and organizations that had previously expressed interest, and is posted on the NWMO's website with an invitation to comment by making a submission, sending a letter, completing a web survey or filling out the comment form.

The purpose of this document is to report on the comments received from more than 75 individuals and organizations about the most recent Plan, *Implementing Adaptive Phased Management 2011 to 2015 (Draft for Review)*, and how the NWMO will take these comments into account in work going forward. Five questions were identified for consideration during review of the Plan:

1. The draft Plan is built around seven strategic objectives. Are the objectives that we have identified appropriate? Have we missed key areas?
2. The draft Plan identifies work and activities we propose to undertake to accomplish these objectives. Have we set out appropriate activities?
3. The draft Plan is intended to anticipate the challenges ahead and plan for them. Over the next five years, what are the key challenges that will need to be addressed?
4. What will the NWMO need to put in place to respond to these challenges?
5. Other comments, questions or suggestions?

Overall Reaction and Key Challenges

Overall, comments received were generally supportive of the plan. As we begin to proceed with the implementation of the site selection process, comments have begun to focus on the more detailed and near-term challenges in implementing what is generally perceived to be a strong plan.

Comments focused on a number of challenges. These comments help to continue the conversation about some of the ongoing challenges that need to be addressed in implementing the strategic plan, and form part of the ongoing conversation to direct and refine the plan over time.

- » **Ensuring interested communities have the capacity to fully participate:** Comments suggested that small communities that may be interested in this project may not have the capacity to take the leadership role that the site selection process requires, or to handle the pressures that may be put upon them by the media and various interests outside of the community. It is therefore important that the NWMO support capacity building in these communities to fully participate in the process and to successfully address and manage these pressures. We have heard that this is likely to require substantial resources from the NWMO, including ongoing relationship building and other support.

- » **Ensuring communities will benefit from the project:** The NWMO has committed to ensuring the community that ultimately hosts the project benefits from it. One of the challenges that the NWMO will need to address over the next five years, according to the comments received, is the potential for the project to be transformational for a community, including economic development, values and priorities. Comments underlined the importance that focus is kept on the broad well-being of the community in assessing and managing potential impacts, including spiritual and cultural dimensions, and not just the impact on economic factors or wealth. This will help ensure that communities are both fully informed about the potential effects and are in a position to manage these effects to the benefit of the community.
- » **Sustaining direct and participatory collaboration:** The site selection process requires direct and participatory collaboration with the community. This not only requires communities have the capacity to fully participate, and resources may be required to ensure this as discussed above, but it also requires that the community have “space” to identify its own interest and consider this interest with respect to the project in the way in which it sees fit. The way in which each community engages its citizens in dialogue may be unique to that community, reflecting the decision-making and citizen involvement processes that have evolved in that community over time. We heard the NWMO needs to find ways to support communities in implementing the decision-making processes that they choose and to address activities of outside interests that may wish to influence the community-led process.
- » **Ensuring free, accessible and credible information on risk to communities:** Like many major initiatives undertaken in our society today, the implementation of Adaptive Phased Management requires making decisions in the face of some uncertainty and risk. Although there is a high level of confidence that the uncertainty and risk inherent in the project is manageable through the knowledge and technological capacity we have today, some concerns continue to be raised. The challenge in this area concerns how differences of view and competing facts might best constructively be addressed as part of the community-led dialogue and decision-making process. We heard that sources of neutral, unbiased and factually accurate information are important to effective community decision-making and must be made available and protected throughout the site selection process.
- » **Sustaining involvement of interested organizations:** As the site selection process becomes more locally driven, comments underlined that the NWMO needs to continue to foster broad public conversations and discussion to sustain the interest of individuals and organizations. The challenge is how best to foster this broad conversation while ensuring the community has the space to learn about the project and reflect upon its interest.
- » **Building trust in the NWMO and ensuring accountability:** Comments suggested that as the NWMO begins to focus its relationship building on communities that are interested in the project, and in the surrounding communities and region, it will need to ensure that it continues to be transparent and accountable for its actions to a broader audience of citizens. The challenge that will need to be addressed is in the balance that will need to be struck between providing communities space to reflect and make their own decisions, and the NWMO openly and transparently reporting on detailed activities as they are undertaken over the course of the site selection process.
- » **Adapting plans:** There is general agreement that the NWMO must adapt its processes and plans throughout the implementation of Adaptive Phased Management. However, as we proceed with the site selection process and move to a more local focus, questions are being raised about the implications for communities that may wish to host the project. The challenge that the NWMO will need to address throughout the process, we have heard, is both to be nimble in order to be responsive to changes that may arise, but also to make firm commitments to communities about the nature of the project to be implemented to ensure these communities are fully informed in their decision-making.

This year, many comments and questions were received about transportation of used nuclear fuel, and a number of individuals specifically advised that the NWMO direct attention to the social and political challenges that accompany the transportation of used nuclear fuel. In response to this comment, additional discussion of transportation considerations have been added to the revised plan.

- » **Demonstrating safety and building confidence in the transportation of used nuclear fuel:** Dealing with the concerns of transportation communities was identified as a key challenge going forward, and it was suggested that the NWMO address this challenge through publishing detailed studies on the risks associated with various transportation methods and through engagement of communities along potential transportation routes.

The NWMO also continues to receive comments and hear ongoing debate on the question of what ought to be the future of nuclear power and how the implementation of Adaptive Phased Management is, or should be, affected by decisions in this area. As has been outlined elsewhere, the NWMO makes no judgment about the appropriate role of nuclear power generation in Canada and suggests that those future decisions should be the subject of their own assessment and public process.

- » **Future of nuclear power:** We have received comments from some that Adaptive Phased Management should not be implemented before a plan has been put in place to end the use of nuclear power. We have received comments from others that it is important to move forward with the long-term management plan as expeditiously as possible and concern that the NWMO show greater urgency in its work. We understand this latter view is the predominant view among Canadians, who tend to feel that since waste exists, it must be dealt with and a plan must be put in place for its management irrespective of the future of nuclear power in Canada.

Comments on Strategic Objectives and Planned Activities

The plan is organized along seven strategic objectives. The objectives and initiatives in each area reflect priorities for the planning period. Overall, comments about the strategic objectives were generally positive, and most people found the objectives and associated activities appropriate.

Comments related to the strategic objectives included the following:

- » Some comments underlined the importance of working with citizens, and in particular, those that are affected by decision-making. Several comments focused specifically on the need to ensure that Aboriginal peoples are informed and appropriately involved in decision-making from its most early stages. Involving Aboriginal people in the process and providing them with knowledge and resources was discussed by several of those who commented, including that the NWMO should recognize local sensitivities when approaching individual Aboriginal communities about siting. As well, sustaining relationships with young people and giving them an active role in the process was identified as a priority by some.
- » Comments were also made about the importance of encouraging communities involved in the site selection process to adopt transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, and the need for the NWMO to ensure transparency in exploring the ethical dimensions of siting decisions throughout the process.

- » Suggestions included clarifying certain aspects of the site selection process: how willingness must be demonstrated by communities that wish to host the project; the timing within which a community can withdraw from the process; the types of resources available to interested communities to participate in the site selection process; the role of communities in the surrounding area and on the transportation route in decision-making; the role of environmental considerations in decision-making; the role of provincial governments in decision-making; and how the NWMO will select one candidate site over another.
- » Though one submission criticized the use of estimates of the number of jobs and other benefits associated with the project, another submission preferred even more detail. More generally, comments suggested there is a need to ensure that discussions of jobs and centre of expertise associated with the project are not used to inappropriately influence a community to act in a way that is against its best interests.
- » The Plan was credited with noting the need to understand and incorporate Traditional Knowledge in site evaluations; however, greater detail on how it will be incorporated in the process was requested.
- » Some questions were raised about how fairness might best be assured, and whether inclusion of provinces with little or no nuclear waste should be the focus of the site selection process.
- » A few suggestions focused on better communicating the specific desirable characteristics of potential host rock and ensuring early on that only communities with desirable geology are considered.
- » Some contributors asked for more information on technical details of the deep geological repository, including the amount of space required to manage the material, and how storage and transportation containers will be managed once they have fulfilled their intended function.
- » Enhanced detail about the costs and funding arrangements for Adaptive Phased Management was a theme among some of those who commented. Greater clarity surrounding the used fuel producers' responsibility to bear the cost of implementing Adaptive Phased Management was requested, as well as updated figures on the range of projected costs of the project.
- » In previous years, the NWMO had been reminded that Canada's plan for used nuclear fuel should also be responsive to advances in technical and environmental knowledge, and changing social conditions. This year, comments highlighted the importance of keeping abreast of developments in energy and environmental policy, as well as retrievability, monitoring and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The NWMO was also encouraged to continue planning for future scenarios reflecting changes in societal capacity to implement Adaptive Phased Management, and to continue to monitor international experiences in managing used nuclear fuel.
- » Ensuring the ongoing independence of the NWMO's Advisory Council was the focus of comment by a few individuals. As well, some reminded the NWMO of the *Nuclear Fuel Waste Act* requirement to include representatives of the informed and willing host community and affected Aboriginal organizations and host region once identified. This is in addition to members with expertise in a broad range of scientific, technical and social scientific disciplines, as well as expertise in Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge.

A number of comments and suggestions were also made on providing greater clarity in the document concerning a list of general questions of ongoing interest such as: Who funds the NWMO?; Why was Adaptive Phased Management selected rather than another approach, and what is the basis for confidence in its safety?; How will the project be overseen by regulatory authorities?; and What are the phases of implementation for Adaptive Phased Management, including closure and long-term monitoring?

In response to comments received, revisions were made to the strategic plan to increase clarity concerning the NWMO's plans and commitments in many of these areas. The NWMO also acknowledges the importance of bringing greater specificity to plans in several areas. Although this specificity has not been incorporated in the Implementation Plan document in all cases, plans are expected to become more detailed as the NWMO continues to work collaboratively with potentially interested communities, and surrounding communities and Aboriginal peoples, to implement Adaptive Phased Management. More detailed plans will be described in NWMO publications, such as the Triennial Report and backgrounders, as well as on the NWMO website. As this is an evolving program, we encourage those interested to visit the NWMO website for latest updates. This includes information on the names of communities involved in the site selection process at any given point in time, the involvement of Aboriginal peoples, the funding and resources available to support participation, ongoing monitoring of developments in energy and environmental policy, the monies set aside in segregated funds to pay for the implementation of Adaptive Phased Management, and the detailed technical research and facility designs that are being developed.

Dialogue Continues

The NWMO continues to receive comments and suggestions about its work programs and plans, even after the close of the official comment period for the 2011 to 2015 Plan at the end of January 2011. All comments are welcome as the NWMO continues to develop and adapt its plans.

