

**Text of a letter from Elliot Morley, Minister for the Environment to  
Professor Charles Curtis OBE, Chair of RWMAC**

17 March 2004

I am writing to you, and through you to the other members of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee (RWMAC), to inform you of the decision that we and our devolved administration colleagues have taken concerning the future of the Committee.

As you will be aware, we have been considering this issue very carefully since the decision taken to set up the new Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) under the "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" programme.

The decision we have taken is set out in a written statement made to Parliament, and provided with this letter. It is that RWMAC should be put into abeyance for the 2-3 year period that CoRWM is compiling its recommendations on future policy for the long-term management of the UK's higher activity waste.

As part of our review we considered carefully the proposal for a reconfigured and slimmed down form of operation that you put to us last year, following the meeting with Michael Meacher. However, we were unpersuaded that this would provide the same level and quality of advice that Ministers, or indeed the Committee itself, have come to expect. We would also be looking to recruit new members to the Committee in future with the same qualifications and qualities as those of existing members and this might not have been easy given the Committee's changed circumstances.

This has not been an easy decision to have taken and, I am sure, will come as a source of great disappointment to you and your members. But, in reality, decisions always have to be taken in light of a number of potentially conflicting considerations and constraints. It is for this reason that we have chosen to put the Committee into abeyance and couple this with a further review of our advisory machinery needs in 2-3 years, when CoRWM's work is either nearing completion or complete.

I should also like to take this opportunity, in writing to inform you of this decision, to also thank you and all your members for all the effort that has been put in to providing us with sound advice on a wider variety of policy and regulatory issues. I am aware that the majority of the Committee have done this for a number of years now. These efforts have been greatly appreciated.

I understand that some individual members, including yourself, undertake ongoing RWMAC representational work in light of past Committee advice. We shall be looking to provide for a suitable period of further involvement in these existing activities under the terms currently applying to such work. We shall be looking to set the appropriate arrangements for this in place in the near future, subject to the nature of the requirement and the agreement of those involved.

If there are any points that you feel you or your committee would wish to put forward or discuss by all means feel free to let me know and we can arrange a suitable meeting.

I am copying this letter to all other RWMAC members.

Regards

Elliot Morley

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 22 March 2004

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Future of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee

(RWMAC)

**The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley):**

With the establishment of the new Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) during the course of 2003, UK Government and the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales have been reviewing the future of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee (RWMAC). This is as we said we would do in the September 2001 "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" consultation document.

In light of this review, we have concluded that RWMAC should be put into abeyance for the two to three year period during which CoRWM will be compiling its recommendations on future policy for the long-term management of the UK's higher activity radioactive wastes. At the end of this period we shall carry out a further review of Government advisory machinery needs in the radioactive waste management policy area.

This has not been an easy decision to take given the quality of the past advice we have received from RWMAC. But the key factors that have swayed my colleagues and me in arriving at this decision are:

we believe that in principle it would be wrong for Government to have two "independent" advisory committees operating in the radioactive waste management policy area;

we believe this could create problems of perception of the respective roles and requirements of the two Committees;

we are fully committed to the CoRWM process and the need to drive this forward over the next two to three years, to arrive at a decision on how best to manage the UK's higher activity radioactive wastes;

the resources available to us must be focussed on this task.

During the course of our review work, we did receive a proposal from the committee for a reconfigured and slimmed down form of RWMAC operation. We considered this very carefully, but it did not solve the basic problem of having two independent advisory committees operating in the same policy area. And we felt that this could have potentially led to a lesser degree and standard of advice than we, and potentially the Committee itself, have come to expect.

We recognise that needs for review and advice could arise during the period that CoRWM is conducting work and RWMAC is in abeyance. Our proposal, for the period of CoRWM's work, is to consider and address these in a case by case manner through our Radioactive Waste Policy Group (RWPG). This is a Group made up of UK Government, devolved Administration and regulatory body representatives that meets regularly, several times a year, to discuss radioactive waste management policy and regulatory issues. The Group has the remit to carry out reviews, calling on external advice, as necessary.

I have written to the current RWMAC Chairman and his Committee members to inform them of this decision and to thank them for the hard effort, and sound advice, that they have provided in recent years. This advice will remain available for scrutiny and use on the Committee's website [www.defra.gov.uk/rwmac/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/rwmac/).