

Letter from the RWMAC Chairman Professor Charles Curtis to Elliot Morley esq., MP
Minister of State for Environment and Agri-Environment.

18 June 2003

I am writing as Chairman of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee (RWMAC). The Committee was set up in 1978, following a recommendation by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, to provide advice on all aspects of radioactive waste management policy and regulation. It is sponsored jointly by your own Department and the devolved administrations for Scotland and Wales.

RWMAC advice has covered issues of short, medium and long-term radioactive waste management policy and regulation, although more than 90 per cent of our work has fallen into the short and medium term categories. As part of the 'Managing Radioactive Waste Safely' process, however, a new Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) is being appointed to undertake widespread consultation and to advise on options for long-term management of high activity wastes. In this context, your predecessor, Michael Meacher, asked me to submit a proposal for a reconfigured and reduced cost RWMAC to continue to cover high priority short and medium term issues.

The rationale behind Mr Meacher's request is that, because of Defra spending constraints, RWMAC cannot continue to be resourced at current levels over the period in which CoRWM will undertake its programme on long-term management policy development. It is important, however, that an independent source of advice is retained in relation to the short and medium term issues if public confidence is to be maintained during a period of major institutional change, e.g., the proposed creation of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA).

It is against this background that I am submitting with this letter my proposals for a reconfigured RWMAC. Key points to note are:

- the proposed terms of reference have been amended to exclude any work that will be covered by CoRWM;
- the proposed programme delineates those high priority items that will continue to be covered by the reconfigured RWMAC from those which will now be excluded. I should of course be happy to discuss the detail of these inclusions and exclusions;
- we propose retention of the current broad membership template for the Committee but with a reduced number of members;

- through the above changes, and the adoption of new ways of working, we can reduce expenditure on RWMAC very substantially (see my detailed proposals in the annex to this letter);
- an open and transparent form of operation would be maintained by submission of Ministerial advice immediately on completion, prompt publication on the RWMAC website, and consolidation of all advice in a single hard copy Annual Report.

To ensure the new arrangements work smoothly, I am suggesting agreement of the annual work programme with Ministers as before. I should also like to suggest regular meetings, including an annual review meeting, with officials so that they can be assured that the Committee's work is on track. I also recognise that appointments will need to be rationalised in line with OCPA requirements.

I naturally hope that these proposals will be acceptable to you and RWMAC's other sponsoring Ministers. I and Committee members continue to believe strongly that there will be important work to do over the next few years which will not be covered by CoRWM. This view was shared by Michael Meacher when we met recently.

I am copying this letter to Ross Finnie and Carwyn Jones for information.

Professor Charles Curtis OBE
Chairman of RWMAC

Attachment to Professor Curtis's letter of 18 June 2003 to Elliot Morley MP.

PROPOSAL FOR A REDUCED RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RWMAC) DURING THE MANAGING RADIOACTIVE WASTE SAFELY (MRWS) PROGRAMME PERIOD

Summary

- **At this time of great institutional change, RWMAC needs to continue to maintain its expert independent advisory role on shorter and intermediate waste management issues, most notably relating to the introduction of the new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA);**
- **The RWMAC Committee will work on agreed areas not covered by the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM), and, by so doing, ensure the latter is not distracted from the MRWS process;**
- **By refocusing the Committee's work and significantly modifying its ways of working, annual running costs will be reduced from £160,000 to £80,000 and Defra support from 3 to 0.25 persons, freeing up corresponding resources for CoRWM.**

Background: The MRWS process is concerned with long-term solutions for the management of solid radioactive waste. CoRWM is charged with managing the process and delivering recommendations to Government. Much the greater part of RWMAC's activity concerns shorter term management of solid wastes, liquid and gaseous discharges, the problems of "small users" (hospitals, universities, etc) and key site issues (such as radioactive particles at Dounreay). The Committee also has an interest in relevant regulatory matters.

Revised Terms of Reference

To advise the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and, in relation to devolved matters, to advise the Minister for Environment and Rural Development in Scotland and the Minister for the Environment in Wales, on the technical and environmental implications of major issues concerning the development and implementation of an overall policy for the management of civil radioactive waste but excluding those issues assigned to CoRWM as part of the MRWS process: and on any such matters referred to it by these persons.

Proposed Programme

The work programme will be agreed with Ministers within the defined budget and drawn from the following:

a) Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA)

- Establishment and takeover of responsibilities (including site strategies)
- Regulatory interfaces

b) Regulatory developments

- EA/SEPA/HSE interactions - discharge authorisations (especially Sellafield, Dounreay)
 - Nirex packaging advice, Letter of Comfort system, waste inventory
- c) Low activity wastes
- Drigg post-closure safety case and RSA93 reauthorisation
 - generic LLW-VLLW-VLRM-contaminated land issues
- d) Small users
- NHS/universities (including VLLW disposal)

Excluded from new remit

- a) Defence wastes
- b) Long term management of higher activity wastes (CoRWM)
- c) Government consultations (unless NDA-related or agreed with sponsors)
- d) RSA93 authorisation consultations (unless high priority and agreed with sponsors)

Membership Template

A strength of RWMAC's credibility has been the breadth of expertise brought to bear on problems. The proposal will retain the same broad template but with a reduced number of members.

Implementation of New Ways of Working

- No formal group structures. Members will be called on to undertake specific tasks according to individual expertise.
- Collective experience of wider membership maintained via electronic circulation of all material to all members for discussion and approval.
- Budget overall, fixed at £80,000; to include expenses and fees. (This amounts to approximately 200 person days for a reduced size of Committee.)
- RWMAC Secretary Role provided by a member.
- Plenary meetings reduced from 5 to 2.
- Much reduced call on DEFRA/RAS secretariat (0.25 person, reduced from 3) for OCPA and NDPB sponsorship functions, budget monitoring and payments, website management and publishing arrangements for Annual Report.

Reporting

To maintain openness and transparency the reconfigured Committee will: submit advice on completion; promptly publishing it on the RWMAC website; and consolidate this advice in a single hard copy Annual Report.

Interface with Defra

Ministerial approval of annual work programme.
Regular RWMAC-RAS meetings (Chairman-HoD RAS) to clear any new, high priority, work for inclusion in programme and to monitor resources.

Review

The arrangements should be fully reviewed and future needs considered after CoRWM has made its initial report.

June 2003