

Guardian Tue 23 Oct 84

Plumb of Seascale

and marine environment that are now its hallmark.—
Yours faithfully,
Steve Billcliffe.
33 Rectory Close,
Newbury, Berkshire.

Sir,—You report (October 18) that nuclear waste processed in Britain for foreign customers under post-1976 contracts "is to be returned to the country of origin." But the situation is not as clear cut as that.

When asked by the Town and Country Planning Association at the Sizewell inquiry whether the post-1976 option to return wastes would be taken up, British Nuclear Fuels Ltd replied that it would be "guided by Government," but understood that this was the intention.

The next day BNFL corrected itself by saying that "the Government intention is clear as far as high-level waste is concerned. It is not clear as far as intermediate-level and low-level waste is concerned."

It is for these last two categories of nuclear waste—quantities of which greatly exceed the high-level waste—that this country must urgently seek new disposal facilities.—Yours faithfully,
Jennifer Armstrong.
Snape Maltings.
Suffolk.

Sir,—Your report (October 16) on the blacking of the research ship, *Discovery*, is misleading.

Our research, under contract to the Department of the Environment, is to pro-

vide scientific information that will help the department to make an informed assessment of the feasibility of disposing of radioactive waste beneath the ocean floor. To do this we make many types of observations and measurements to find out about the sediments that form the sea bed. No nuclear materials are involved in this research: it is not, as was implied, illegal under the London Dumping Convention.

One of our difficulties has been to find out the conditions of the deeper sediment layers. The penetrators, which you refer to as canisters though they are of solid steel, come to rest as much as 100 feet below the sea bed. By monitoring them we can learn much about the strength of the sediments, and by making measurements with instruments mounted on them we can find out about the physical and chemical conditions they encounter. They provide a novel technique that will have uses far beyond the present research.

Our immediate objective is to test a communications system, designed by us, that will relay all the measurements to the surface. Until this can be done, we cannot add the penetration technique to those already available to us. —Yours faithfully,

A. S. Laughton.

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