

## Email from David Smythe to Lord Oxburgh dated 13 Dec 2013

[no reply ever received]

Dear Lord Oxburgh

You may remember me from a field trip to Nevada nearly 30 years ago organised by Brian Wernicke (Harvard). We were part of the UK contingent, and we two even shared a room in one of the motels. I was also a frequent visitor to Cambridge in that era, regularly seconded from the BGS (Edinburgh) in the glory days of BIRPS.

I am writing about the woeful meeting that the HoL SciTech committee had with Michael Fallon last week. I presume you were present in an *ex-officio* capacity. You are clearly the most eminent (perhaps the only!) earth scientist in either House. If having an unelected second house is to have any moral justification, then it depends largely upon having experts like yourself being able to speak out on matters technical in the national interest.

But the committee comments about Cumbrian B&B owners 'vetoing' the MRWS process in West Cumbria were nothing short of juvenile. The fact is that Cumbria CC actually looked carefully at both the geological evidence and the lack of democratic support. That is why CCC pulled out of the process.

I was largely responsible for broadcasting the fact, via consultation submissions, website pages and public lectures, that none of the geology of Allerdale and Copeland is *at all* suitable for a deep repository. But DECC and its predecessor Defra have been engaged in a predetermined campaign to return to the Sellafield area for a GDF site ever since the outcome of the Nirex planning inquiry in 1997. The whole concept of supposed 'voluntarism' is a ploy to put off looking at the geology until it is too late. I have no doubt that once a few hundred millions have been sunk in investigations at an unsuitable location, there will be no practicable way that regulators will be able to say 'stop'.

You will remember that this same committee (chaired by yourself, I believe) in its third report (1999) recommended a national survey, followed by volunteering:

6.31 We suggest that the first phase of site selection be carried out by the Commission, which could contract independent professionals if necessary (as proposed by RWMAC, see p254). This phase would consist of establishing qualitative criteria and using them with desk studies to identify a "long list" of, say, 15-20 potentially suitable sites. The criteria at this stage would be primarily, but not exclusively, geological and hydrogeological (QuantiSci p 245, RWMAC pp 254-256). A short list of sites for possible field investigation (including the drilling of deep boreholes) would then be derived by comparing the sites on the basis of a number of attributes. The attributes and the comparison method, including the weightings for the attributes, would be established by the Commission and made public. The final list of sites for field investigation would be derived by consultation or by using a volunteering approach ...

What happened to these very sensible recommendations? CoRWM-1, was set up, with a remit to examine voluntarism only. The committee lacked a single earth scientist (a fact that you deplored in your 2004 report castigating CoRWM).

During the MRWS Cumbria process (2010-13) my colleague Stuart Haszeldine (Edinburgh Uni.) and I submitted a total of about 190 pages of detailed geological argument on the unsuitable geology of West Cumbria. None of this evidence has ever been challenged. CCC listened and read, which is why it decided to withdraw. Copeland BC councillors never attended any of our several public lectures on the subject (even though the date of one was specifically shifted to accommodate the council leader - but she then never showed up). The name of the game now in DECC is 'three wise monkeys', where it is pretended that one of the best-understood pieces of upper crust on the entire planet (thanks largely to Nirex and the BGS) is somehow 'unknown'.

I would be very grateful if you would look at my latest consultation submission (attached), particularly in the light of the comments made by the Minister which appear to prejudge the issue. It is not too late to bring the science back into play.

I should add that Stuart Haszeldine and I would be very happy to appear before the SciTech committee to discuss these problems, if invited. We do have some constructive suggestions to make, if only the government were to admit that the UK has lost 25 years in radwaste disposal research.

Yours sincerely

David

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