

Charles Hendry MP

Minister of State

Department of Energy & Climate Change

3 Whitehall Place

London

SW1A 2AW

[www.decc.gov.uk](http://www.decc.gov.uk)

CLlr Alan Smith Esq  
West Cumbria MRWS Partnership  
Copeland Borough Council  
The Copeland Centre  
Catherine Street  
Whitehaven  
CA28 7SJ

12 October 2011

Dear Cllr. Smith,

### **Acceleration of timetable for geological disposal**

Thank you for your letter of 6 September 2011 in which you register your concerns around the possible acceleration of the geological disposal programme.

I agree that any perception of being rushed in dealing safely with this issue should be avoided and I would like to reassure you that this was never intended. Our intention is to seek to optimise the overall programme which, as you know, potentially spans a very long timescale, and to ensure that the NDA delivers the best result possible.

As I said at the Geological Disposal Implementation Board (GDIB) in June there will be various opportunities over the long lifetime of the disposal programme for the NDA to optimise its approach and I believe it is in everyone's interests that opportunities for improving upon current plans are properly considered and that the pace of the programme, over the long term, recognises the country's need for a disposal facility to accommodate the high activity waste arising from ongoing nuclear programmes. There is absolutely no question of rushing the public engagement or local decision making processes in the early stages of the programme or of cutting corners in the design and construction of a geological disposal facility which even if it were to open in 2029 would still be a long way off.

Again, I want to reassure you that safety is paramount and no geological disposal facility will be built unless the independent regulators are satisfied. We also have established the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) to provide us with independent advice and scrutiny of the MRWS process.

The NDA is currently working to identify credible options for acceleration of geological disposal. A paper reporting the first results of this work is expected to be presented to the next GDIB in December, however, I would like to suggest that my officials meet with

Partnership representatives in advance of this in order to share the early findings. This could also be an opportunity to discuss your concerns in more depth and engage constructively on the public perception issue, which you have rightly raised and which will be particularly important during your planned third round of Public and Stakeholder Engagement. Officials from the MRWS team here will look to take this forward through their regular contact with the Partnership between now and December. Of course, the offer to join future GDIB meetings remains open, should you wish to send a representative.

*Yours sincerely*



**CHARLES HENDRY**