

Andy Rowell, 16 January 2009



The Nuclear Decommissioning Agency, the Government department in charge of over-seeing Britain's nuclear legacy, secretly discussed making the controversial decision of actively promoting a new generation of nuclear power plants, even though the Agency is meant to be completely neutral.

NuclearSpin obtained documents under the [Freedom of Information Act](#) prepared for a meeting between NDA managers and its PR consultants, Bell Pottinger for a meeting in October last year.

Under its "position on key issues", the NDA set out its policy on "new build" and asked: "how much longer is it sustainable to hold a neutral position? What is needed is clarity. What are the implications, legal and reputational and positioning wise of being pro new build". The document then warned that this issue is of real concern "as the wrong answer to a question could trigger legal / Judicial Review possibilities from the antis."

The NDA's secret deliberations on being pro new build were not disclosed in its draft 3 year Business plan, published last year that said: "As a strategic authority, our duty is to deliver decommissioning and clean-up of the nuclear legacy."

When shown the document – the "antis" such as campaigning group Greenpeace were surprised. "The NDA is responsible for dealing with the UK's existing nuclear waste, and should focus on dealing with this problem instead of supporting any plans which would create more. It's vitally important that such an organisation remains neutral on the subject of new reactors, it was set up to serve the need of the British public not the nuclear industry", argued Jean McSorley, from Greenpeace. "The fact that some in the NDA want to position the organisation as being in favour of new build seriously puts at risk the NDA's reputation. It runs against its remit to deal with the UK's radioactive waste."

The documents were prepared in preparation for a "High Level NDA Communications Strategy" to take place in December 2008, mapping out the NDA's vision from Autumn 2008 until March 2010 as well as the organisation's vision until 2020.

Realising their mistake in sending out the document, the NDA sent an "[agreed record](#)" of the NDA/ Bell Pottinger discussions, with the above text removed. Also removed was a draft of a "user friendly story of the NDA so far". This included the sentence: "We recognised that while the nuclear industry has many strengths in terms of its technology and safety record, it also has weaknesses – namely, a tendency to be secretive and insular and, at times, of being guilty of intellectual arrogance."