

Ruling out UK nuclear power stations would be 'irresponsible'

It is an environmental firm.

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Is new nuclear generation to get go ahead?

Ruling out building a new generation of nuclear power stations in Britain would be "irresponsible", Environment Secretary David Miliband said today.

The controversial move is expected to be recommended by the Government's energy review which is due to be published later this month.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has said he would take "a lot of convincing" that there was an alternative but cabinet colleague Peter Hain has expressed serious doubts.

Mr Miliband said: "As the Environment Secretary, and as this overwhelming global issue of climate change is caused by carbon dioxide emissions, it would be simply irresponsible to rule out one source of energy that is zero carbon emitting.

"What we must do is look at the genuine cost issues, the genuine issues about nuclear waste. We've got to look at those issues very seriously.

"There is no single solution to this; we are going to have to look at all the tools that are at our disposal."

Speaking on Sunday Live on Sky News, he said it was also vital to boost renewable energy use and energy efficiency.

"But given our over-riding commitment to reduce carbon emissions, we can't simply rule out the nuclear energy option because it is very low carbon emitting.

"The important thing I would say to people is that we have nuclear generation at the moment - about 20% of our electricity comes from nuclear sources.

"But that is projected to fall down to about 7% or even 5% so the question isn't should we be increasing the amount of energy that's generated through nuclear sources, the question is should we be maintaining the current level.

Mr Hain warned last week against a "gung ho" approach to new nuclear, saying he believed the case for it was "still to be proven.

"I am very clear that the lights have to be kept on, in 10, 15, 20 years time when this problem of supply really seriously hits us ... and if nuclear is the only way to fill it, well I'll reluctantly have to accept that.

"But if we get to that point without a massive ramping up of renewable energy then I don't think the public will support it," he told the BBC.

Shadow trade secretary Alan Duncan said new nuclear should be a "last resort".

"The nuclear power sector should be there as a last resort in many respects," he told BBC1's The Politics Show.

"We want to explore every conceivable method of generating electricity before we go to nuclear because we think so much of this is on the edge of a scientific generation which can change the pattern and the nature of our electricity generation."