

## Nuclear cutback in energy plans

*Political vote gathering.*

The Observer  
July 2, 2006

Britain could be spared a mass building programme of nuclear power stations under plans to force power companies to reduce energy use and help the public cut their fuel bills.

Alistair Darling, the Trade and Industry Secretary, said tackling the 'waste' of power would ease pressure on resources and, while that would not be enough to avoid the need for nuclear power altogether, it would mean fewer reactors being built over the next three decades.

Darling, who admitted he would be 'hard pressed to find anybody' who wanted a new power station (Ed: *or a four-hundred-foot wind-mill*) near them, is said to have told colleagues privately that as few as two or three reactors might eventually be built compared with the 20 originally suggested in Downing Street leaks of his energy review. He told The Observer it was possible, although 'unlikely', that Britain would end up without a single new nuclear plant.

Wind farms will also get a boost in the review, published this month, which sets out how to keep energy flowing as the current generation of nuclear reactors reach the end of their useful lives. Planning inquiries for all major power projects – from nuclear to green technologies such as windfarms – will be shortened to prevent them becoming bogged down in years of legal battles with local residents.

The shift of emphasis in the review, which critics had feared would represent a headlong rush for nuclear power, reflects government fears of being 'out-greened' by David Cameron – and Treasury resistance to plans to make reactors more economically attractive to build. The Tories are still debating their position, with pressure from frontbencher Alan Duncan to come out against nuclear power, but are expected to argue in a paper this week that the case is not yet proved either way and that the market should decide whether new reactors are necessary.

Both they and the government will back proposals for mini neighbourhood power stations, which would use heat generated by creating electricity to provide hot water for nearby homes – a more efficient use of power which Darling said could eventually meet up to a fifth of Britain's energy needs.

'The main drivers here are to cut demand: and we have got to exploit renewables and the greener forms of energy effectively in a way that we have just not done,' he said.

Power companies could, in future, be given incentives to kit out customers' homes with low-energy bulbs, loft insulation or 'smart' meters which warn customers when they are wasting power, he said. That would reduce the amount of electricity that householders needed.

'It's all very well to encourage individuals to change their behaviour, but, frankly, asking 27 million householders to do that depends on an awful lot of people, and we are all human,' he said. 'There are six people who supply our energy, on the other hand, and the regulatory regime encourages them to supply as much energy as they can at the

moment. What we need is to put an obligation to supply it [efficiently]. If this works, we might have to build fewer power stations in the next 30 years than we would otherwise do.'

The approach will be backed by a report to be published this week from the think-tank the Institute of Public Policy Research, arguing that greater efficiency could cut energy use by 30 per cent. 'We should be up in arms about energy that's wasted,' said Simon Retallack, head of its climate change programme.

Government insiders say that Darling has produced a 'greener' review than expected. 'Alistair has rather cleverly changed the emphasis, so it is not nuclear with a vengeance,' said one Whitehall source.