

## UK's Darling touts nuclear as eco-friendly

*All the nuclear news is from the UK at present.*

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The government must build new nuclear power plants, generate more electricity from wind and waves and curb domestic demand to fight global warming as well as keeping the lights burning, Prime Minister Tony Blair's spokesman.

He also stressed the need to reduce rising dependence on imported oil and gas as supplies from the North Sea dwindle.

"Wishful thinking will not keep the lights on," he told reporters on Tuesday. "Nuclear is not the only answer, but neither is renewables the only answer or energy efficiency the only answer. What you need is the mix."

"What we have to do is move beyond wishful thinking to the hard realities of a world in which energy has become more expensive, in which this country is moving from a state where it was self-sufficient on energy to potentially being 90 percent dependent on foreign imports," he added.

Nuclear power accounts for 20 percent of the country's electricity, but that is due to slump to just 6 percent as all but one of the ageing plants closes within 20 years.

He was speaking ahead of Trade Minister Alistair Darling's presentation to parliament of the eagerly awaited Energy Review setting out the structure of the electricity network for at least the next two generations.

The decision to back a new fleet of nuclear power plants will boost the global nuclear industry as it starts to recover from the 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant.

Nuclear power, seen by some as a weapon in the fight against global warming because it emits no climate changing carbon gases, and energy security will also dominate the agenda at this weekend's summit in Russia of the Group of Eight rich nations. Darling earlier told BBC radio renewables, that supply only 4 percent of the country's electricity, should do far more but would not be able to plug the 30 percent gap between supply and demand as the old nuclear and coal plants close.

"My fear is that if you don't do anything else you are going to get more gas-fired power stations which is not good for the atmosphere and it is not good because you tend to import," he said.

The government wants power companies get more of their supplies from renewables and to boost local generation such as rooftop wind turbines and solar panels.

It also wants to streamline the planning process to avoid lengthy and costly delays.

But it has a dilemma in that it has also repeatedly ruled out any public subsidies for new nuclear power stations in view of the 70 billion pounds it will cost to clean up the lethal waste from the existing fleet.

Generators including British Energy and EdF have said they would be prepared to commit private finance to building new nuclear plants in return for contracts guaranteeing prices.

Analysts say this would be a subsidy by another name.

Environmentalists complain that, by focussing solely on electricity, the review has ignored energy use in industry and transport. Electricity generation accounts for just 18 percent of the country's energy consumption.