

## **U.K.: Nuclear power gets go-ahead**

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Nuclear power is set for a comeback in Britain after ministers agreed that building a new generation of atomic plants was essential to meeting the country's future energy needs.

**A government energy review recommended constructing new nuclear power stations to replace the country's ageing plants**, all but three of which are due to expire by 2020.

Trade and Industry Secretary Alistair Darling told the European Parliament on Tuesday that the new plants would be economically viable, helping to tackle climate change and ensuring energy security.

But the announcement prompted outrage among opponents of nuclear power, who argue that it is dangerous and is not the answer to the challenge of global warming.

In a statement to parliamentarians, Darling said: "The government has concluded that new nuclear power stations could make a significant contribution to meeting our energy policy goals.

"It would be for the private sector to initiate, fund, construct and operate new nuclear plants and cover the costs of decommissioning and their full share of long term waste management costs."

"Safety and security" would be "paramount" in the construction and operation of the plants, he pledged.

Darling stressed that the government also intended to step up efforts on renewable and other clean energy sources, saying: "a mix of energy supply is essential and we should not be over dependent on one source."

However, he added: "Nuclear does mean we can generate electricity without carbon emissions. It does provide a consistency of energy which wind power cannot."

The energy review, ordered by Prime Minister Tony Blair last November, has been mired in controversy from the outset.

Environmental campaigners and political opponents have accused Blair of using the review as a smokescreen for a decision he has already privately taken. He was criticized for prejudging the study after he said nuclear power was "back on the agenda with a vengeance" – just three years after an earlier energy review rejected nuclear power in favor of increased energy efficiency and renewables.

But the prime minister's official spokesman said Tuesday: "Nuclear is not the only answer, but neither is renewables the only answer is energy efficiency."

He told reporters: "You have to think hard about the energy gap. The reality is, if we do nothing, the amount of energy we get from nuclear will decline from 20 percent to 6 percent."

The review also recommended an increased focus on renewable generation and energy efficiency, he noted, "but that in itself will not be enough to make up the shortfall and therefore you do need nuclear."

"Wishful thinking will not keep the lights on," he added.

The government says that the expiry of Britain's existing plants by 2023 will leave an energy gap of around 20 percent of current consumption. Ministers say nuclear energy will play a key role in plugging that gap, while also helping Britain to meet its target of cutting carbon emissions by 60 percent by 2050.

London is also concerned about security of energy supply, with Britain becoming increasingly reliant on imports as its own reserves of oil and gas dwindle.

Last year the country imported 10 percent of its gas – which accounts for 37 percent of total energy consumption – but officials have warned that could rise to 90 percent by 2020.

The review also recommends requiring electricity companies to provide 20 percent of their energy from renewables – up from 15 percent at present.

Carbon dioxide could be stored in old oil fields, it says, an idea, which Britain is already working on with Norway.

But the current controversy centers on the focus on nuclear power, which opponents say will inevitably leach investment from renewable energy production and efficiency measures.

Conservative Shadow Trade and Industry Secretary Alan Duncan said Blair was "out on a limb" with his desire for nuclear power, which, he claimed, was opposed by much of the Cabinet.

Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat trade and industry spokesman, said nuclear power was unsafe, unnecessary, and would impose a heavy financial burden on the taxpayer.

"Every nuclear power station ever built has needed public subsidies and government guarantees. The government's belief that nuclear can now survive without a rigged market flies in the face of the recent evidence from the U.S.A and Finland," he said.

It was "utterly irresponsible" to create more nuclear waste when there was still no long-term solution for the waste created in the last 50 years, he argued, adding that nuclear decommissioning and waste disposal costs were already approaching \$180 billion.

"If the government invested more in energy efficiency and renewable technologies, along with support for local combined heat and power and microgeneration and clean coal technology, then new nuclear build would not be necessary," added Davey.

But the review was broadly welcomed by business. Trades Union Congress General Secretary Brendan Barber said it outlined a balanced approach, which would deliver security of supply and sufficient cuts in carbon emissions.

Meanwhile Richard Lambert, director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, said the government was correct to include both nuclear and renewable power in its thinking. However, ministers must move promptly to put forward detailed proposals, he said.