

Japan Fishing Village hopes for Nuclear Project

One of the last two sites – Cadarache and Rokkasho

Yahoo News (Reuters)

December 18 2003

http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=585&e=3&u=/nm/20031218/sc_nm/science_japan_fusion_dc

Rokkasho, a remote fishing village in northern Japan, was quietly confident Thursday as it waited to hear whether it would become host to a \$12 billion experimental nuclear fusion reactor.

The International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project, a joint venture involving the United States, China, Russia, South Korea (news – web sites), the European Union (news – web sites) and Japan, is expected to announce its choice of site after a meeting in Washington on Saturday.

ITER aims to create the world's first sustained nuclear fusion reaction, which it is hoped will provide a clean, efficient source of power in an imitation of reactions that form the source of the sun's power.

The two front runners to host the 30-year project are an EU-backed site at Cadarache in southern France and the village of Rokkasho, home to 12,000 people, mostly fishermen and farmers.

"We have good solid ground, we are very near a port and we have plentiful supplies of both fresh and sea water," said Kiyoshiro Nozawa, a local official overseeing the Rokkasho bid.

"The French site is not so convenient for ports, so I think we are ahead in that respect," he added.

Rokkasho, near the northernmost tip of the main island of Honshu, some 600 km (373 miles) north of Tokyo, is already the site of a uranium enrichment plant and a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant is scheduled to be completed by 2006.

Nuclear fusion involves sticking atoms together, as opposed to the splitting of an atom that is at the heart of nuclear fission, the process used in today's atomic power plants and weapons.

Fusion power has been touted as a solution to the world's energy problems, with proponents saying it would be safe, cause little pollution and require only sea water for fuel.

In half a century of research, however, it has never been achieved in a commercially viable way.