

Dame Meg Hillier
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

31 January 2023

Dear Dame Meg,

Following the publication of the Committee's report into the future of the Advanced Gas-cooled Reactor (AGR) fleet in May 2022, I am pleased to enclose further information below with respect to Recommendation 4a of the report regarding whether it would be technically feasible, safe and cost-effective to extend the lives of any of the remaining operating stations if needed.

Securing the future of the UK's remaining generating nuclear fleet remains a key EDF priority

EDF's stewardship of the existing fleet and life extension investment programme has led to all AGR stations operating for significantly longer than originally expected, adding years to their operational lives and providing critical low carbon energy, jobs and skills for the UK. There are, however, some life limiting factors in the design of the AGRs that EDF must take into account as it considers whether further extensions are possible. EDF will aim to maximise future output, as long as it can meet strict safety and regulatory requirements and the stations remain commercially viable.

AGR fleet

EDF has invested £7billion in extending existing fleet lifetimes since acquiring the business in 2009. At that time it was forecast that all seven AGR power stations would have stopped generation by 2023. Three stations are now in the defueling phase and there are four remaining generating AGR stations - Hartlepool, Heysham 1, Heysham 2 and Torness.

Hartlepool and Heysham 1 stations came online in 1983 and have been invaluable parts of the nation's drive towards a lower carbon future and continue to be important employers in Lancashire and Teesside. The two stations share the same design and are due to produce electricity until March 2024, with the main life-limiting factor being the condition of the graphite reactor cores. This estimate is based on a review in mid-2021. In light of the pressures on domestic energy security, the results of recent graphite inspections and the need to provide clarity to staff and contract partners, EDF is reviewing whether or not Heysham 1 and Hartlepool could reliably generate beyond the current forecast. This review is due to conclude in the next couple of months.

Sizewell B

Sizewell B power station in Suffolk is the nation's only Pressurised Water Reactor and, since coming online in 1995, has generated enough electricity to meet the needs of every home in Suffolk for more than 180 years. It has also saved the UK more than 80m tonnes of CO₂ emissions.


Work is underway to look at extending the operational life of Sizewell B by at least 20 years, from 2035 to 2055. Many PWRs around the world have already obtained approval to operate to 60 years and some are working towards 80 years. The work EDF is doing will identify how we maintain high safety standards and operational reliability beyond 2035.

We also need to be sure there will be sufficient revenues to enable sustainable, longer-term operation. The expected investment of over £700m is an important part of maintaining safety – by replacing and refurbishing equipment to ensure its ongoing safe, reliable operation. Some works may take several years to implement, with long lead times to purchase equipment, so a decision is required in the coming years to enable that investment to happen with less impact on energy security.

This approach is in line with the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation made in May that we work with the UK Government and the Office for Nuclear Regulation, to establish what the lifetimes at the remaining operating stations will look like. Our overall objective is to maximise zero carbon output from these key national assets, as long as it is safe and commercially viable to do so and while EDF maintains ongoing Government and regulatory support.

I hope the information provided above is helpful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Paul Morton'.

Paul Morton
Nuclear Decommissioning Director