

DOUNREAY STAKEHOLDER GROUP**CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT****Introduction**

It has been a privilege to have chaired the Dounreay Stakeholder Group throughout the 2024/25 session, working alongside DSG Members through our Public Meetings, Subgroups and ad-hoc sessions. DSG Members have helped highlight matters of importance to the local community, the workforce at Dounreay/Vulcan and scrutinise the broader socio-economic impact of nuclear decommissioning over this period and I wish to thank all of those who have contributed to our activities.

As Members will be aware, the Dounreay site has undergone a period of change in recent years; exiting the COVID-19 lockdown with the removal of the PBO model, the 'joining' of the site with the Magnox group (now NRS) and significant turnover at the executive level of the organisation. These large strategic and structural changes have been made alongside progress on the core decommissioning mission, the long-awaited announcement of the site 'route map' or lifetime plan (LTP) and highly published industrial action in early Summer.

I am not aware of any DSG, past or present, who has had to scrutinise such a volume of diverse matters and to have done so as responsibly and fairly. Ultimately, the DSG acts as a conduit between the community and the site; we must give the public in Caithness and north Sutherland confidence that robust scrutiny is being undertaken, without unnecessarily creating the news ourselves. At times this has been a fine line to walk and in many cases it would have been easier for the DSG to be pulled into taking stances (both private and public) than engaging in open dialogue with all parties. To do so has enshrined the independence of our Site Stakeholder Group, from the site, regulators and funders. A guiding principle upon which we do our best work, acting as a critical but supportive colleague, not a pressure group.

My Business Meeting (Davie Alexander, Gillian Coghill, Peter Faccenda and Roger Saxon) deserve great thanks for their dedication and diligence in ensuring matters of interest to the DSG have been given the forums required to be heard. Our subgroups are a key asset to our function as an SSG, something not replicated in other parts of the NDA estate. Whilst we all understand the extremely challenging environment we all operate in; clarity and honesty is valued above all else by our members and our subgroups provide a semi-formal environment to discuss matters in detail, whilst ensuring the correct and proper context is provided by specialist support.

Throughout the 2024/25 term, the DSG Business Meeting have continued to meet at least once per month, ensuring information flows between the business meeting and members and I would like to thank members for their continued contribution in commenting on documents, taking part in meetings both physical and virtual, attending conferences and providing comment/views for various consultations. These meetings are designed to provide as open a forum as possible to discuss pressing matters. On the whole, I believe they have worked as intended and provided a robust place to plan DSG activities, free of influence from the site. Those who have attended our business meetings at various times throughout the year have

been invaluable in providing useful information to ensure the DSG were kept fully informed of activities on and off the site.

I would also like to record a personal thanks to my Vice-Chair Davie Alexander who has ably deputised for me when work commitments or ill-health has prevented me from representing the organisation. Like myself, Davie has attended numerous meetings across the UK representing the DSG and our members, doing this alongside his role as Chair of the Socio-economic subgroup.

Lastly, I would like to commend and thank the Secretariat and some key contacts who support the work of the DSG and facilitate our contact with the site and key stakeholders. Dawn and Tina are the first point of contact for the vast majority of DSG actions and provide a friendly and helpful environment for matters raised by our Members. Gail Ross, the Head of Communications has kept me as Chair updated with all pertinent matters relating to the site over the last year. Magnus Davidson and Dave Calder have regularly contributed to our work (both in private and through our subgroup activities) and have gone above and beyond to provide information to the DSG on a range of socio-economic matters across our purview. Frederic Stalin has provided the DSG with responses to a wide variety of matters across the site and has acted as a vital anchor to discussions on the Life Time Plan. And Commander Ian Walker of NRTE Vulcan has continued to furnish our discussions on the future of the Vulcan site with great clarity and honesty throughout my tenure. I would like to thank you all.

Activities 2024/25

The DSG continued to play an active role in activities both local and national and below provides a summary of these:

Meetings attended by DSG representatives

Regular **meetings with the Site Executive** are facilitated by the DSG secretariat, with quarterly meetings held at Dounreay. These forums provide an opportunity to discuss matters of interest to the DSG membership alongside targeted discussions that have ranged from commercial procurement to site safety.

Whilst these meetings have been previously limited to members of the Business Group only, I am delighted to have extended this invitation to interested members as part of the ongoing commitment to **visit key decommissioning projects**. A recent tour of the PFR facility was a great opportunity to see cutting-edge decommissioning up close, alongside some of the challenges faced by NRS Dounreay teams in respect to ageing assets and infrastructure.

A future visit to the FCA is scheduled for later this year and I would encourage all interested members to express their interest to the Secretariat as spaces will be limited due to visitation constraints.

The **Site Stakeholder Group Chair's / Vice Chair's Forum** meets quarterly and is chaired by Aled Jones from the Wylfa station in North Wales. This forum provides vital interaction between the SSG Chairs and Vice Chairs from across the NDA estate and provides an incredibly useful opportunity to raise national issues with local contexts.

To that end, we have recently used the forum to speak ‘with one voice’ and provide a challenge to NRS and the NDA in respect to a recent controversial review of SSG activities. The review recommended a ‘more uniform’ way of working and by extension a reduced level of independence from SSG to SSG. The Chairs forum roundly rejected the premise that our meetings should be overtly influenced by the site operators, nor the suggestion that reporting could be harmonised across the estate. Each SSG is unique and should use its independence to ensure that its members, and its members alone, dictate what matters to discuss, what reports they receive and the dialogue to expect from the site.

Emolument for office bearers was also raised at the SSG Chairs/Vice Chairs forum in respect to the recording of payments and the responsibility on each of the operating sites to tax those in receipt, at source. This has proved a difficult test for many Chairs and Vice Chairs across the nuclear estate, with office bearers being added to payroll systems for each site. We believe this creates unnecessary questions about the independence and perceived influence from the nuclear industry itself, and any payment (and tax due) should be delivered through the NDA and not the site companies.

On behalf of the DSG, I have attended the **Scottish Government Scottish Nuclear Sites meetings** throughout the course of 24/25; providing a DSG update for regulators, observers and fellow SSG stakeholders. These have been largely moved online in recent years, with the last in-person meeting taking place in Edinburgh in 2023. These forums are unique across the stakeholder landscape as they also include reports from Faslane and Rosyth, two bases that seldom get coverage in respect to the nuclear industry at large.

The Cross Party Group on the Civil Nuclear industry has been an excellent ‘new’ forum that the DSG has attended in 2024, operating in both the Scottish Parliament and remotely through online access. The DSG has worked alongside stakeholders from across the country to explore and demonstrate a greater understanding of the importance of the civil nuclear sector to Scotland. Themes have included waste, and nuclear skills and will include site visits in the very near future, the first of which being Chapelcross in Dumfries. Local organisations (and individuals) can request to be a member of the CPG in their own right, and I would encourage those who wish to make representation to do so by contacting the Secretariat (David Wallace, NDA).

The **NDA Stakeholder Summit** was held in Manchester Airport, with myself, Davie Alexander and Dave Calder from NRS attending. Although the summits are a welcome opportunity to have dialogue with colleagues and understand the NDA group’s operations more broadly, it has not been held in close proximity to a licensed site for some years. Given the significant expense and planning undertaken to host such an event, I do wish that it included more community-focused elements, such as visiting the recipients of socio-economic funding or viewing frontline decommissioning of the sites. I believe that this would be a very valuable opportunity for stakeholders from across the estate to compare and contrast their site operations and socio-economic activities with those of the host community

Representation at various other meetings continued including:

- Caithness Transport Forum
- The Focus North Advisory Board
- Caithness Community Planning Partnership

Consultations

The DSG has been a regular respondent to consultations from local, devolved and national governments, regulators, site licence holders and the NDA as the responsible statutory authority for decommissioning the UK's legacy nuclear sites.

Whilst the DSG has contributed to a variety of consultations this year, I am conscious that we have become reliant on individual (member organisations or individuals themselves) responses in recent months.

When the DSG can speak 'with one voice', I believe we are stronger and provide more authority to influence policy and decision-makers. I know that consultations are an area that Members would like to see us to address and we must look at how we provide sufficient support and capacity to do so going forward.

Changes to personnel

Particularly in respect to the Dounreay civil site, we have seen a number of members of staff come and go and I would like to place on record our thanks to all those who have contributed to DSG business over the year and extend good wishes to those who have moved on.

The interim Managing Director John Grierson took over the site at a difficult time for Dounreay and proved a very able leader who resolved to make some immediate changes and 'steady the ship'. John's engagement with the DSG was always open and honest, even if the discussions were difficult to have. I believe he has left the site in a far better state than he found it and I look forward to working with his successor Dave Wilson, who was appointed in November of last year.

We hope that the site can enjoy a period of calm, particularly at the executive level, where we have seen a high turnover of personnel. It is our intention to work constructively with all members of the Executive team, providing robust but constructive challenge and acting as a conduit between the site and the community.

Looking forward

The long-term outcome of the NRS merger will continue to be closely monitored by the SSG, building upon the scrutiny role we undertook throughout the end of the PBO era. Whilst we welcome the commitments that funding will continue to be safeguarded and that Dounreay will maintain a strong identity, the medium to long-term financial outlook is not as certain as the immediate future. Ongoing dialogue with Lawrie Haynes (NRS Chair) and Rob Fletcher (NRS Chief Executive) continues to be vital in putting forward our support for frontline decommissioning at Dounreay, carried out safely and securely in a community hosting the UK's only other category one site.

DSG patiently awaits an endorsement of the sites Life Time Plan (LTP) , or road map. Through thorough dialogue with the site and programme managers, we believe the LTP realistically

outlines the scale of the decommissioning challenge and the requirement for a long-term commitment to plant, equipment and property on the site. As intimated previously, public acceptance of this reality is the cornerstone of our lobbying power with devolved and central government, statutory agencies and programmes of national significance. It is vitally important that our community believes in the timeline for site decommissioning and that we can plan for any changes in workforce levels and the availability of contracts for our local supply chain.

In previous Chair's updates, I have been unapologetic about my interest in NRTE Vulcan and the Ministry of Defence's intentions for the establishment. The short-term extensions to work have been a welcome development, but given the scale of defence investment that will be needed to counter continental threats to British security, I believe the MoD must reflect on the capabilities hosted at the site. Decommissioning an authorised site when nationally important work must be undertaken may prove short-cited. I therefore welcome commitments from NRS Dounreay, (the Managing Director, Chief Executive and Chair) that Vulcan will only become an option for decommissioning when the MoD is ready... and that no undue influence is pushing an accelerated timeline for the site. Until that time, if it comes, we should consider that supporting the Submarine Delivery Programme will reap the maximum local benefits through high-skilled local employment and a valued supply chain.

Conclusion

When I was elected to the Highland Council in May 2017, I made a promise that our nuclear community would have a strong voice and champion. Too often the voices from the Far North are drowned out by those in Inverness, Edinburgh or London. The DSG provides a vital forum for strong voices, standing up for our industry, our people and our future.

As we enter a new term, I endeavour that we mustn't down tools. It has never been more important than for this forum to speak with one voice, particularly as we engage with a new Government in Westminster and the prospect of change at Holyrood in 2026.

After much discussion with my Business Meeting and reflecting on a range of commitments that I have undertaken since joining the DSG, I have decided that I wish to be put forward for a further year in office. Although the convention is to limit Chair's tenures to five years, it was agreed between the NDA and the Chair and Vice-Chairs forum that COVID presented an extraordinary event and would be non-qualifying. After consulting with colleagues and assessing that this next year must be one of transition amid further change, I believe continuity of leadership justifies me taking the option afforded by the NDA for a further year.

I thank you for your continued support and for playing your role in providing oversight and scrutiny of the site operations alongside the opportunities for future employment for, not just today's workforce, but to ensure future employment opportunities for future generations to come.

Thank you,



Provost Struan Mackie
DSG Chair
1 February 2025