

NUCLEAR BRIEF

US export moratorium ?

Proliferation of the international trade in nuclear technology is "very rapidly becoming a major political issue in the United States", Mr Llewellyn King, Editor of *Weekly Energy Report*, told the *Financial Times* conference on nuclear power last week. Hearings set for July 20 on the subject would bring it into the front line, and if proliferation became an issue in the coming elections, he predicted, there would be a "de facto moratorium on the export of nuclear technology", a change which would affect the world nuclear market. The issue was a "lively" one in Congress, and the President was "very concerned".

Reprocessing prospects

The prospects for the nuclear fuel reprocessing deal that British Nuclear Fuels Ltd (BNFL) is negotiating with Japan look "very good indeed", and there has been "very good progress" in negotiations with European countries for similar business, according to Mr Con Allday, managing director of the company. The deal, which involves BNFL's reprocessing facility at Windscale, attracted a good deal of publicity earlier this year, since when the French firm Cogema has been introduced on one side and changes have occurred in the team on the Japanese side. An Anglo-French mission recently visited Japan for talks.

Uranium fix

Canada is resisting the efforts of the US Justice Department, which has served subpoenas on two of the country's three major uranium producers, to investigate alleged attempts at price fixing. The chairman of one of the companies is also president of the Uranium Institute, the trade association representing the industry's producers and consumers which recently held its first annual general meeting in London. It has not been served with a subpoena, and stresses that its activity does not and would not include price fixing. Several companies in the United States have also been served with subpoenas.

THE pressures on Britain's countryside increase, and so do the efforts of those concerned with wildlife conservation. Since the 1939-45 War, 146 National Nature Reserves covering nearly 120 thousand hectares have been designated, and voluntary organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the National Trust, and the County Naturalists Trusts have obtained control of only slightly less ground. In these days of world shortages, and the need to produce more food in Britain to reduce imports and the balance of payments deficit, there is concern as to whether it is right to set aside so much land for the benefit of the minority of the population interested in our native animals and plants.

At a meeting recently organised by the Royal Society on the scientific aspects of nature conservation in Britain, two main topics were discussed. The first was the value of conservation as such; the second concerned the contribution of science, particularly ecology, to conservation and the management of nature reserves and other protected areas.

The conservation of the land, of water and of natural resources is clearly desirable, and wildlife may be looked upon as just another "resource". The difficulty is to give this a value, particularly a cash value. Many of the arguments about the economic importance of wildlife are unconvincing to the layman, and may prove counterproductive. It is true that several wild birds and plants may act as inexpensive and delicate indicators of pollution, but the important species are not confined to nature reserves. Wild plants have proved valuable in work in producing new crops, but it is difficult to argue convincingly that the gene pool of the Spring Gentian in upper Teesdale has

a contribution to make to food production.

It is safer to base one's support for wildlife conservation on scientific, educational, cultural, aesthetic, recreational or even sentimental grounds. The scientific argument

Nature conservation



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would perhaps appear to be the strongest, but even here the conservationist must not appear to claim too much. Nature reserves provide essential facilities for ecological research, and so make an important contribution to that science. However, we may become involved in a circular argument: reserves are provided for research, which yield results which enable us to maintain those reserves so that they continue to provide facilities for more research. To the sceptic this may sound too much like "jobs for the boys". I believe that we conservationists should be honest, and admit that our motivation is not, mainly, economic. We should not be ashamed to admit that our interests

are, at least partly, aesthetic and sentimental, and that we believe that conservation contributes to civilised living.

But if we do not claim that conservation is of economic importance, what do we say to those who complain that we are harming agriculture? Could not the quarter of a million hectares in different types of reserves be better used by our farmers? First, it should be noted that only a tiny fraction of these reserves is grade 1 or grade 2 farm land, suitable for arable cultivation. Secondly, we lose vastly greater areas, often of the best land, to housing, factories, motorways and airports. This loss now amounts to 30 thousand hectares a year; in four years the loss in area exceeds that of the 146 National Nature Reserves. The first priority should be to reduce, and eventually stop, this continuing erosion of our farmland.

In the meantime, conservationists are surely right in trying to acquire as many sites as possible. Modern farming, to be profitable, cannot afford to support wildlife except in marginal areas. We need reserves where wildlife has priority, and some areas should be on good farmland, which supports larger numbers of more species than the barren moors generally left to the conservationist. We certainly need to produce more food, but first let us cut out waste. Nearly a quarter of the food bought in our supermarkets ends up in our dustbins, and intensive livestock rearing wastes over ninety per cent of the rations fed. So long as these processes continue, conservationists need have few qualms when they designate new reserves, particularly as this land, unlike that used by industry, could easily be brought into fruitful cultivation in an emergency.