Clinch River

Breeder reactor to breed more bonds

Washington

IN a final effort to save the Clinch River breeder reactor, the electric utility industry has formulated a plan to distribute the project's \$3,500 million construction costs more evenly between the government and the private sector. Under the plan, submitted earlier this month to the Department of Energy (DoE), \$1,000 million would be raised through the sale of bonds to private investors; this would represent some 40 per cent of the money needed to complete the reactor.

Last month, a coalition of nuclear critics and fiscal conservatives in Congress finally achieved what they have for several years come within a hair's breadth of doing: deleting funds for Clinch River. What tipped the scales was not concern over safety or even nuclear proliferation (which former President Carter made the central issue in suspending work on the breeder and on reprocessing of plutonium), but the increasingly skewed economics of what was to have been an industry-government partnership. Under the original contract, signed in 1972, industry and government were each to have borne half of the costs, then estimated at \$500 million. But the contract specified that all overruns were to be borne by the government alone. Industry's \$257 million share, originally 50 per cent of the total cost, fell to below 10 per cent.

In failing to appropriate any funds for the project for 1984, Congress did not quite kill it. It had earlier indicated that if the administration presented a realistic proposal for redistributing costs, it might be willing to go ahead and approve funds. But that would have to occur before the beginning of the new fiscal year on 1 October. DoE is expected to act quickly on the utilities' new plan, and may bring it before Congress as early as next month.

The plan does not actually call on the utilities to spend any more of their own money. Instead, it would use the industry's contribution (\$150 million so far, plus an additional \$175 million to come) and a government guarantee of revenues from the sale of electricity from the plant to back the sale of \$1,000 million in bonds. The bonds would be backed by an indirect contribution from the government of a further \$150 million in tax credits and depreciation benefits. The utilities say they have been assured by several leading investment houses that the bonds, so backed, would be competitive in the financial markets. Wallace Behnke, chairman of the Project Management Corporation — the consortium of utility contributors to the project — said there seemed to be little possibility of the utilities' obtaining approval from the

state rate commissions for increasing their direct contributions to the project. (As state-regulated monopolies, the utilities must clear all such financial decisions with the state commissions.)

Although \$1,000 million has already been spent on Clinch River, construction has been repeatedly delayed. Following the

UK nutrition

Government chokes on report

WHOLEFOOD enthusiasts may have been right all along. That seems to be the message of nutritional guidelines contained in a draft report from NACNE, the National Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education. However, the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS), which established NACNE to provide expert advice for health educators and government, appears to find the conclusions unpalatable. The report was first drafted more than two years ago but DHSS has so far refused to publish the guidelines, as the committee intended. The latest draft is described by one disillusioned scientist as "an emasculated version" of the original.

The existence of the report was disclosed in last week's *Sunday Times*. It was prepared at NACNE's request by an *ad hoc* group of 10 nutritionists chaired by Professor Philip James, director of the Rowett Institute in Aberdeen. The group sets down a consensus view of an average diet aimed at maintenance of health and primary prevention of disease, particularly those of public health importance such as heart disease.

Unlike previous nutritional guidelines from DHSS, James's group puts figures on the proportions of different nutrients in what it considers a healthy diet. Recognizing that most nutrition-related diseases in the United Kingdom are "diseases of affluence", the emphasis is on lowering average intakes of certain diet components rather than defining minimum intakes: it advocates the term "healthy varied diet" to replace "balanced diet" in the health educator's phrase book.

Following the Royal College of Physicians, NACNE concludes that even mild degrees of obesity are important for public health, being associated with cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The desired reduction in average weight would best be achieved by decreasing the proportion of total energy supplied by dietary fat from 38 per cent to 30 per cent, with an increase in the ratio of polyunsaturated to saturated fat. Contrary to previous advice, NACNE recommends an increase in total carbo-

hydrate intake; sucrose intake, however, should be halved, to about 20 kg per head per year. Total energy intake would remain unchanged. Intake of dietary fibre, especially cereal fibre, should be increased by 50 per cent to 30 g per day for adults, and salt intake should be cut from 8–12 g per day to nearer 5 g per day. More fresh fruit and vegetables would prevent deficiencies of folic acid, vitamin C and (by increasing uptake) iron.

The group's report was welcomed by NACNE's chairman, Professor Jeremy Morris of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. But, not surprisingly, it is unpopular with the food industry; manufacturers of sugar, salt and some dairy products may have good cause to be alarmed. The British Nutrition Foundation, an independent body of scientists and representatives of the food industry, has drawn attention to the "far-reaching economic implications worldwide" that would follow from substantial reductions in sugar or butter consumption.

The NACNE working group says its proposals could be achieved within 15 years; the agricultural and food industries will, it says, be able to make plans in good time for adjustments in processing and labelling. NACNE suggests a breeding programme to produce leaner meat and a reduction in the fat content of meat products. One third of the proposed changes could be implemented within five years.

A spokesman for DHSS says the latest version of the report (thought to be the ninth) will be reviewed by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy, known affectionately in the department as Coma. The department says that there is no obligation to publish the report, because the group that produced it was not a formally constituted subcommittee. One of the ironies in DHSS's reluctance is that, together with reports from the Royal College of Physicians and the World Health Organization, DHSS publications formed one of NACNE's main sources of information.

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