Dear John

A Public and Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Framework for Geological Disposal

I am writing to respond on behalf of the Institute of Physics to your consultation document on a public and stakeholder engagement and communications framework for geological disposal.

An issue as complex and controversial as the Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) is bound to be a matter of great concern to many different sectors of society. We agree with the NDA’s view that an inclusive stakeholder engagement programme is a pre-requisite to developing a successful approach to arrive at outcomes which carry public support.

The issue of nuclear waste management is an emotive one, and the views of some concerned stakeholders can be strongly divergent from those of informed specialists. In response to the questions in your consultation document which relate to the content of communications (Question 8.2 "Who to Communicate With", Question 8.3 "How to Communicate", and Question 8.4 "Levels of Detail of Communication"), it is important therefore that as much clear, authoritative and independent information as possible is provided to underline those aspects of the debate where the science is generally accepted. The Institute of Physics believes that this process would benefit from the involvement not only of scientists from the nuclear industry or NGOs, who will be perceived as having a particular outcome they wish to promote, but also independent and respected scientific bodies such as the learned societies.

Over recent years, the learned societies have established substantial knowledge on a range of issues, and the energy sector is one which has attracted a high level of attention. We believe that there is a role for learned societies in establishing the extent of “common ground” on the scientific facts of the issues around a GDF and its location, to allow a clearer and more focused deliberation of those areas where there is disagreement. The Institute of Physics would be very pleased to work with other bodies such as the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Geological Society to improve the quality of public engagement in this area,
The Institute supports the NDA’s efforts to develop a comprehensive communications framework, and particularly the idea of a national forum for geological disposal (Question 4.3). This could serve the NDA and RWMD as well as stakeholders by providing public transparency and involving national-level NGOs; sharing experiences and communicating consistency of treatment between the sites under consideration.

The Institute is a leading communicator of physics with all audiences from specialists through government to the general public. It is charged, through its Charter, with increasing the understanding and application of physics, and has a desire to see a scientifically sound approach to the GDF process. The Institute can call upon a substantial body of nationally and internationally recognised expertise to shape its contribution. It has a dedicated energy advisory group (a sub-group of the Science Board of the Council), good links with the UK and Irish physics community and an extensive worldwide membership of over 34,000 from a broad range of physics disciplines.

The Institute would be happy to contribute to the engagement process selected by the NDA. I would welcome an opportunity to discuss this further with you.

Yours sincerely

Beth Taylor
Director, Communications and External Relations