



The Nirex map showing possible nuclear waste dumps

## Nuclear waste heads offshore

A map leaked to Lincolnshire anti-nuclear waste campaigners suggests that the ill-fated search for a British "intermediate level" nuclear waste dump is homing in on sandbanks in the Wash. Checks on the authenticity of the map have also revealed that many of Britain's most attractive offshore islands, most of them bird and seal sanctuaries, are still being considered for radioactive waste dumping.

The map is marked "Nirex 1st option class 2 waste". Nirex, or UK Nirex Ltd, is the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive, and was set up in July 1982 to find and build a new national nuclear waste-disposal site. It is owned by BNFL, CEGB, UKAEA, SSEB and the government.

The map, which was passed to a member of the Boston-based "Wash Watch" anti-nuclear group, Ann Wil-

liams, marks two sandbanks—Gat Sand and Roger Sand—near Boston, Lincs. Three ports which could be used for transporting waste to the offshore site—Boston itself, Fosdyke, and Kings Lynn—are also marked. Both sandbanks form part of the Holbeach offshore bombing range, used by the RAF and USAF.

Friends of the Earth, who have successfully tracked most of Nirex's previous site explorations, have seen the map and believe it to be authentic. The Wash, said Stuart Boyle of FoE, was being "seriously considered" and was on Nirex's still-confidential new waste dumps shortlist. The basic map—including the offshore islands marked—is virtually identical to other versions of a UK Nirex search map published at an obscure international congress—and therefore almost certainly genuine. Extra mark-

ings indicating that a site in the Wash is being actively explored appear to have been added by a surveyor and includes notes about possible ports and support from the ministry of agriculture.

A Nirex official said that he could not confirm the authenticity of the map, and refused to say which sites would be selected when the company publishes its shortlist, due early in 1989. But he admitted that the Wash was still being examined as a potential site. The accessibility of ports made it particularly suitable, he added.

Officials of the British Geological Survey, who are working with Nirex, confirmed that although specific field investigations were not yet planned, "officially, nowhere is ruled out". The "preferred environment", he said "would be a small island, low relief hard rock, or seaward dipping sedimentary rocks". This made the region from the Humber to the Wash particularly attractive.

Nirex's plan to use offshore islands also "still has its appeal", said the company representative. It would be more expensive, but "the hydrogeology is likely to be very stable". Of the islands shown on the map, only two—Bardsey Island and Anglesey, both off North Wales—have been officially ruled out.

Nirex's last attempt to find a land-based UK nuclear waste dump ended suddenly in May 1987. Since then, the nuclear industry has been frantically looking around for an alternative. A consultancy document produced in November 1987 by Nirex, "The Way Forward", pointed to a deep-sea dump as one of the two options open to it.

But "The Way Forward" failed to acknowledge or include the disposal option advocated by all the major environmental groups, which is retention of all waste at the nuclear site where it is generated. It also failed to display the list of "potentially suitable offshore islands", although these had already been identified and known to experts. Greenpeace dismissed the document as "a sham"; the Town and Country Planning Association said that Nirex "had already made up its mind" before issuing it. An analysis of the public response, prepared by the University of East Anglia, is due in November.

Anticipating heavy opposition to the possible use of offshore islands or an area like the Wash, Nirex has already filed planning applications for disposal sites at Windscale and at Dounreay. But the islands remain under active consideration, and would be used as platforms from

which to tunnel under the sea bed.

The likely public response to proposals to create nuclear waste dumps on key nature reserves such as the Farne Islands, Lundy, or May or Ramsay Island would make last year's outcry when Nirex's unfortunate planners opted to build the dump in the backyards of Tory MPs seem like a tea party. *Duncan Campbell and Nigel Townson*

## Failed architects

Jacques Delors, the president of the European Commission, addressed the TUC Congress at Bournemouth last week to ask Britain's trade union leaders this question. Were they enthusiasts for, sceptic about or architects of European integration? To be comprehensive he should have offered them membership of a fourth category: failed architects. By Thursday of last week when the question was asked, that is how most TUC officials felt.

The EETPU electricians' union's expulsion was not the solution to union competition over single union deals on greenfield sites, but just another stage in the conflict.

The Congress adopted a finely-engineered, experimental code of practice to regulate these agreements. But even Tony Christopher, the new TUC president, acknowledged it was likely the code would have to be rewritten fairly quickly. The AEU engineering union, the TUC second largest affiliate, has made it clear it intends to continue signing such agreements. So another crisis won't be long in coming and it's likely the rules will be rewritten rather than the AEU expelled.

The AEU's central role was further confirmed by the performance of Bill Jordan, the union's president. Clean cut, articulate, reasoned, he will carry the banner of the right within the unions, after Eric Hammond's expulsion. Indeed he may carry it more effectively than Mr Hammond. While the EETPU has always been quite isolationist, Mr Jordan is keen to lead, to assert his position over the rest of Congress.

Mr Jordan is only matched by John Edmonds, the centrist leader of the GMB, general union. No one from the left came close to Mr Jordan's sense of strategy and purpose. The left may still command substantial block of votes around the TGWU, Nalco, MSF and Nupe—enough to carry the boycott of Employment