

Summary of the outcomes of the Fifth Review Meeting of the Joint Convention By Alexandra van Kalleveen, European Commission, Joint Research Centre (Karlsruhe)
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## **Introduction**

2015 was marked by two significant events relating to international conventions in the field of nuclear safety, namely the Diplomatic Conference of 9 February 2015 to consider a Proposal by Switzerland to amend the Convention on Nuclear Safety and the Fifth Review Meeting of the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management (hereafter Joint Convention) held from 11 to 22 May 2015 at the IAEA Headquarters, in Vienna, Austria.

The European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) is Party to the Joint Convention since 2006 and as such was represented the Fifth Review Meeting. I had the opportunity to participate in the two weeks of the May 2015 Review Meeting as Euratom Delegate and I am pleased to present the major observations and outcomes of that meeting.

## **Background**

Back in 1997, the international community adopted a convention whose objective is to achieve and maintain a high level of safety in spent fuel and radioactive waste management worldwide. The Joint Convention entered into force in June 2001 and there are 69 Contracting Parties to date. In order to achieve its objectives, the Joint Convention adopted a review process whereby: each Contracting Party prepares a National Report on how it implements the convention's obligations; other Contracting Parties have the right to ask questions prior to and at the review meetings; and National Reports are presented and discussed in Country Groups and Plenary Sessions at Review Meetings (the interval between Review Meetings not exceeding three years).

## **Review Meeting Observations**

Most of the first week was dedicated to the review of National Reports for which seven Country Groups met in parallel sessions. The first week also included a Topical Session on Progress and Lessons Learnt from the Fukushima Daiichi Accident, as well as three sessions of the Open Ended Working Group. The second week was composed of Plenary Sessions with the aim of adopting the Final Summary Report of the Fifth Review Meeting.

61 of 69 Contracting Parties attended the Review Meeting (the OECD/NEA was present at Plenary Sessions as an observer). As part of the review process 65 National Reports were provided upon which Contracting Parties submitted around 3000 written questions (about the same amount of responses was provided). More than 700 delegates registered and took part in what was a very productive and engaging review process.

It was clear at the Review Meeting that Contracting Parties are working towards enhancing the level of safety in radioactive waste and spent fuel management. In particular, they identified general areas where major progress has been made since the fourth review meeting which include: national policies, strategies and programmes for spent fuel and radioactive waste management; efforts to enhance openness, transparency and public involvement process; R&D for spent fuel and radioactive waste management; minimisation of radioactive waste generation; emergency preparedness in light of the Fukushima Daiichi accident; construction and commissioning of storage facilities for spent fuel and radioactive waste and disposal for low and intermediate level waste; and improvements in the storage and regulatory control of disused sealed sources.

The Joint Convention peer review process encouraged constructive exchanges and sharing of knowledge in an open manner. It is also worth noting that most Contracting Parties hosted IAEA peer review missions (Integrated Regulatory Review Service) which resulted in recommendations to improve the legal and regulatory framework (many of them being implemented), and that several IRRS Mission reports have been made publically available by the hosts.

Contracting Parties confirmed the actions they took in light of the Fukushima Daiichi accident. Some of them conducted “stress tests” in order to further improve the safety of facilities. The work included improving wet spent fuel storage facilities, spent fuel transfer to dry storage, and revising plans for emergency and emergency response.

Contracting Parties also noted that regional cooperation in Europe is important for it harmonises the approaches to spent fuel and radioactive waste management including through legally binding directives.

Alike the fact that the Joint Convention peer review process identified general areas where major progress has been made since the fourth review meeting, it has also allowed identifying common challenges. Further to the discussions held in all Country Groups, several areas were identified as “Overarching Issues” namely: human resources and financial resources; public involvement and engagement; contingency plans for waste management from significant accident; management of disused sealed sources; management of and funding for decommissioning waste; and early stage strategy for radioactive waste and spent fuel management.

In addition to the Country Groups and Plenary Sessions, I participated in the sessions of the Open Ended Working Group where eight proposals were submitted by the Contracting Parties and discussed over three evenings. They resulted in four recommendations that were eventually approved in Plenary Session after amendments. One recommendation was based on the joint proposal made by Euratom and the United States relating to the promotion of adherence to, and active participation in the Joint Convention.

Last but not least, the EU offered a lunch time session with a presentation on the State of play of the Euratom Directive of 19 July 2011 on the Responsible and Safe Management of Spent Fuel and Radioactive Waste, and presented a report on the Support to the Decision Making in the Management of Spent Fuel and Its Fuel. The US also provided a briefing on the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Status and Recovery. It was acknowledged that these sessions were excellent examples of open sharing of information and lessons learned from Contracting Parties.

### **Conclusions of the Fifth Review Meeting**

The Joint Convention process of reporting and peer review allowed highlighting progress and remaining challenges. Constructive exchanges were made and knowledge was shared in an open manner. However, the number of Contracting Parties is still not commensurate with the number of countries having radioactive waste and a robust peer review process requires full and active engagement by all parties.

Therefore the President of the Fifth Review Meeting will take specific steps to encourage adherence to, and active participation in, the Joint Convention.

Finally, the Contracting Parties agreed to meet again for the Sixth Review Meeting to be held from 21 May to 1 June 2018 at the IAEA in Vienna. The National Reports will cover topics on staffing and resources, increasing acceptance and public involvement on waste management, developing and implementing a holistic strategy for radioactive waste and spent fuel management at an early stage, and management of disused sealed sources.