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Debate on the future energy policy in UK

Britain may consider building a new generation of nuclear power stations

Last November Tony Blair signalled that Britain may consider building a new generation of nuclear power stations to meet the challenge of climate change.
However, nuclear power is not a solution to the energy issue and the challenges of climate change, as shown in several detailed studies published in the last weeks.

The **Government's own Sustainable Development Commission concluded that there is no justification for bringing forward a new nuclear power programme at presen**t. Based on eight new research papers, the SDC report gives a balanced examination of the pros and cons of nuclear power. Its research recognizes that nuclear is a low carbon technology, with an impressive safety record in the UK. Nuclear could generate large quantities of electricity, contribute to stabilising CO2 emissions and add to the diversity of the UK's energy supply. However, the research establishes that **even if the UK's existing nuclear capacity was doubled, it would only give an 8% cut on CO2 emissions by 2035** (and nothing before 2010). This must be set against the risks.

The report identifies five major disadvantages to nuclear power:

- **Long-term waste** – no long term solutions are yet available, let alone acceptable to the general public; it is impossible to guarantee safety over the long-term disposal of waste.
- **Cost** – the economics of nuclear new-build are highly uncertain. There is little, if any, justification for public subsidy, but if estimated costs escalate, there's a clear risk that the taxpayer will be have to pick up the tab.
- **Inflexibility** – nuclear would lock the UK into a centralised distribution system for the next 50 years, at exactly the time when opportunities for microgeneration and local distribution network are stronger than ever.
- **Undermining energy efficiency** – a new nuclear programme would give out the wrong signal to consumers and businesses, implying that a major technological fix is all that's required, weakening the urgent action needed on energy efficiency.
- **International security** – if the UK brings forward a new nuclear power programme, we cannot deny other countries the same technology*. With lower safety standards, they run higher risks of accidents, radiation exposure, proliferation and terrorist attacks.

Greenpeace UK published also report, "Decentralising UK Energy", which studies several possible future UK energy scenarios based on the key criteria of cutting carbon emissions; security of supply and costs. In particular the report compares models of two possible future scenarios: centralised generation using nuclear power, and **a decentralised system**, in which **energy is predominantly produced close to its point of use using renewables and combined heat and powe**r (CHP).
The results are clear: **the decentralised solution is far superior, being cleaner, cheaper and more**

secure. Based upon this research the City of London will also go towards a decentralised energy network.

Furthermore, according to scientists writing in the journal *Nature Material,* **it is solar rather than nuclear energy which should be the UK government's priority** in planning future energy production.
They argue **that photovoltaics**, the direct conversion of sunlight to electricity, **could match and exceed the nuclear industry's current output before any new reactor could begin operating in the UK**.
Unfortunately the UK has recently halted its programme of solar panel installation on 3,500 rooftops halfway through. This compares to the completed installation of 70,000 installations in Japan and 100,000 in Germany.

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