



The OECD Nuclear Energy Agency 50th Anniversary

Nuclear Thinking for a Greener Future

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It is a real pleasure for me to celebrate with you the 50th Anniversary of the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA). It is important that the global financial crisis does not cast a shadow on all the good happenings that are taking place around us, and this is certainly one of them.

The 50th Birthday of the NEA is cause for celebration. This Agency is a key body for the OECD and for the whole world. Its work is improving our knowledge and proper use of one of the most important alternative energies. Its ideas and assessments are helping countries make nuclear energy more secure, more affordable and clean.

This is a unique opportunity to express my firm support to the Agency and my appreciation for the relevance and quality of its work, carried out by an effective team under the leadership of its Director-General. Congratulations!

Nuclear energy is back

The creation of the NEA in February 1958, by the members of the then Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (the predecessor of OECD), was a visionary act.

Five decades later, the world is facing a pressing energy panorama and one of the most needed assets globally is cleaner and reliable alternative energy to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels.

Our current energy habits are unsustainable because they are dirty, wasteful and disastrous for the environment. Global primary energy demand is expected to increase by more than 50% by 2030. Nearly 70% of this increase will come from developing countries. And we can no longer meet the bulk of this demand with traditional fossil fuels.

Nuclear power can provide an important source of alternative cleaner energy. In fact it is already doing so.

Nuclear power plants provided 22 per cent of total electricity in OECD countries in 2007. Although the proportion of nuclear power generating capacity in the total capacity mix declined slightly during last year, plans to increase nuclear capacity are gaining momentum in countries like Canada, Finland, France, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

In a growing number of emerging economies nuclear power is also becoming an increasingly important source of alternative energy. Plans for a strong expansion of nuclear electricity capacity have already been initiated in China, India, the Russian Federation and South Africa.

We must work together to build common understandings, shared visions and globally accepted concepts and measures that allow us to have a clearer picture of nuclear energy's advantages and drawbacks; but also to make nuclear energy more reliable.

The key role of NEA: Nuclear Thinking for a Greener Future

The role of NEA in supporting the scientific and technical development of promising nuclear reactor and fuel cycle technologies, and in favouring a safe, environmentally friendly and economical use of nuclear energy, has become strategic.

Throughout half a century, the NEA has supported its member countries by issuing authoritative data and analyses on peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

It has helped them to build common frameworks on national practices in key areas as reactor safety, protection against radiation, and radioactive waste management; as well as in nuclear law and regulatory applications.

Its current membership of 28 OECD countries, which account for nearly 85% of the world's installed nuclear capacity, demonstrates the value of the NEA as a platform to share policy experiences, to create joint international projects and to benefit from co-operative validations through "peer reviews".

Its growing relations with non-member countries are another proof of its expanding relevance. In fact, one of the priorities of NEA during the coming years is to expand its cooperation with emerging economies; very much in line with the overall OECD objective of becoming a hub for dialogue on global issues.

One of the main challenges that the Agency has faced in its first half-century is the constant evolution of governments' and societies' views on the role of nuclear energy. This has led to increased flexibility in its work, to address different concerns and policy issues.

The value added of international organisations results from their convening power and their skills in drawing findings, conclusions and recommendations from state-of-the-art knowledge and data provided by national experts.

The NEA has successfully achieved this goal with a rather small staff, selecting key topics to address in close cooperation with senior experts from member countries. The quality of its staff and the flexibility of its work programme in response to evolving concerns have contributed to the success of its outcomes.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Worldwide interest in nuclear energy is growing. There is a clear commitment to increase generating capacity in many countries in the years to come. By 2050, this type of energy is expected to increase by 50 per cent, on a low-base scenario. The Agency's high-base scenario suggests an increase by a factor of nearly 4.

This renewed interest in nuclear power in many member and non-member countries brings in new concerns and key policy issues, such as security of nuclear fuel supply, adequacy of safety infrastructure, availability of human resources, strengthening of international cooperation and participation of civil society.

Nuclear energy will be part of the supply landscape for more than another 50 years as nuclear power plants being built today are designed for life-times exceeding half a century.

The Nuclear Energy Agency will very probably have the opportunity to celebrate its 100th Anniversary. This is not a risky forecast. In the meantime, this Agency will undoubtedly pursue its activities and support a growing number of countries in nuclear energy policy-making through multi-lateral dialogue, joint projects and forward looking studies.

I would like to conclude this opening statement by congratulating the Steering Committee for its wise guidance, the senior management of the NEA for its efficient leadership, the national experts for their contribution to Committees and working groups and the NEA staff for its dedicated and talented work.

I wish the Agency a successful future. We at the OECD are very proud to have you as a Member of our family, to help the world economy work better.

Thank you very much.