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1. A response was submitted to the DECC consultation on the draft National Planning Statement (NPS) on Electricity Networks Infrastructure, as outlined in news293. The response did not cover the (important) Appraisal of Sustainability (AoS), which itself incorporates the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and extends it to social and economic effects of the NPS. The response was also silent on nuclear power, renewable energy targets and wind farms. Instead it focused on over-arching strategy and power lines. One problem with such Appraisals (AoS) is the fragmented tick-box approach. Bits of framework and NPS are tested against many criteria, but this fails to identify the overall shortcomings: what is missing, what gets lost in the bureaucracy.

2. Infrastructure projects expected to be considered by the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) are helpfully listed on the IPC web site. Click on "Projects" at <http://infrastructure.independent.gov.uk/>  
The IPC schedules expect that decisions will be made within 12 months of accepting the application.

3. At the IPC update 18-2-10 there were 12 project applications expected in 2010, none of them for powerlines. There were 9 projects listed for 2011, including the 400kV powerlines at Bramford-Twinstead (26km, expected application 1-6-11) connecting Sizewell C and Bridgwater-Seabank (60km, expected application 1-8-11) connecting Hinkley Point C.

4. It is well known you can buy a legal opinion on either side of an argument. The idea extends to many fields calling on expert witnesses. Science is no exception. Revolt and others have argued for plurality in expert advice, not least on EMFs, noting developments on drugs advice (news290.4-9). Now we see the same "rival" advice with economics, with a 60-strong group supporting the UK government line "as a riposte to the 20 economists" who supported the opposition a few days earlier. Let them all be heard! And let their interests be known! There is of course genuine uncertainty in the relevant economic models, and no certain right answer but a balance of uncertain risks.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/-/1/hi/business/8523034.stm>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/8514767.stm>

5. The Lancet Editorial [www.thelancet.com](http://www.thelancet.com) Vol 375 February 20, 2010 is titled "Advising the UK Government". It refers to the Principles proposed 6-11-09 in the wake of the David Nutt affair by scientists and "Sense About Science" (SAS) at <http://www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/index.php/site/project/421>

The Editorial also refers to the government 15-12-09 response at <http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/detail.aspx?NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=409612>  
That was a consultation draft (now closed) from BIS, the government department for Business, Innovation and Skills. A joint submission of 11-2-10 from CaSE and SAS to the consultation offered Amended Principles and can be seen at <http://www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/index.php/site/project/452>

6. The government response 15-12-09 was to replace the SAS principle of Academic Freedom by one on “Trust and Respect”, including “*The Government and its scientific advisers should work together to reach a shared position, and neither should act to undermine mutual trust*”. The Lancet Editorial describes that as collusion. Surely it is far too cosy to support real independence. It would be much better, both for government and for advisers, to embrace genuine plurality of advice and to welcome dissent in a plural context, instead of trying to marry independence with toeing the government line. What is needed here is a blend of the three SAS principles with the four “Great Steps” we proposed in news291.2.

7. Toby Hall passes on a report: South Africa has stopped funding the development of the pebble bed modular reactor, leaving the project company looking at 75% cuts in staff (World Nuclear News, 18 February 2010).

This had looked a promising development for distributed small-scale nuclear generation (news170, 172). Wikipedia reports the South African project was postponed last September. China is said to be developing pebble-bed technology.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pebble\\_bed\\_reactor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pebble_bed_reactor)