

Citizens' Panels

Case Study UK CoRWM Public and Stakeholder Engagement Process

Country United Kingdom

Date of Latest Update: August 2013

Background Information

In 2003 and 2006, the Committee on Radioactive Waste management (CoRWM) organised 4 different Citizen's Panels in different regions of the UK to consult members of the public and obtain their opinions and views and their reactions to the committee's initial short-list of possible waste management options. Although participants were randomly selected, members of NGOs, journalists, local councillors and those with family members in the nuclear industry were specifically excluded. The Panels were reconvened later in the MRWS process to allow participants to comment further on CoRWM's detailed recommendations by being able to question experts either individually or together.

Phase of decision making process

CoRWM was established as Stage 1 of the MRWS (Managing Radioactive Waste Safely) process. This followed previous failures to obtain local acceptance for a proposed site for a deep geological repository for higher activity wastes. CoRWM was mandated to examine and assess all possible waste management options and to make recommendations to government on a way forward. The findings were to feed into government deliberations, which resulted in a White Paper in 2008, outlining a revised, voluntary siting process.

Formal framework of decision making process

Government required CoRWM to make recommendations upon which it could base a new siting policy. The 2008 White Paper introduced a voluntary process, with staged decision points. Communities were invited to participate, and the relevant decision-making bodies (local councils) were then to decide whether to continue in the process, up to a certain point beyond which they cannot withdraw. If detailed exploration is necessary, the planter requires planning permission to continue.

Objectives of process

To provide assistance to CoRWM in the development of recommendations to government. The committee was mandated to develop recommendations to government on waste management options, using a range of methods to elicit public views.

Status

Complete

Objectives and outcomes of stakeholder engagement

The initial objectives of the panels were:

- To contribute to CoRWM's option short listing process;
- To contribute to development of assessment criteria for relative evaluation of the short listed options;
- To develop perspectives on ethical issues;
- To comment on CoRWM's proposed programme for assessment of the short listed options. The Panels were then reconvened to gain citizens' inputs into the assessment of the short listed options developed by the committee. The Panels were also reconvened to undertake

what was referred to as a 'holistic assessment' of the shortlisted options at the end of the second reconvened Panel sessions.

The initial Panels were intended to be consultative, allowing CoRWM to understand concerns amongst the public, introduce participants to the issues and explore their views, and prepare them to assist in the options assessment exercise at the second Panel. The reconvened Panel sessions were decision-making, as participants were able to decide on the validity of CoRWM's output. These Panels discussed CoRWM's 'long-list' of options and were able to question invited experts.

A set of weightings was obtained from each Panel, although there were great differences between the weightings from different Panels. Indeed, one CoRWM member felt the deliberations at one of the Panels were likely to be of no use to the overall process, such were the anomalous views expressed. There was useful information gained in terms of the ethical approaches to waste management, discussed in separate groupings at each Panel.

Involved Stakeholders

Members of anti-nuclear groups, people with household members working in the nuclear industry, local councillors, and journalists, were specifically excluded from recruitment. Others were found to cover all ranges of age, sex and occupation. Each panel was representative of a regional area of the UK (North England; South England; Wales; Scotland). It was also planned to have representatives in appropriate specialisms, including disposal, regulation, storage, NGOs and independent academics. This was however not possible in practice.

Implementer of the participation process details

CoRWM, with facilitation provided by independent consultants from the University of Lancaster.

Financing

The total cost of the PSE process was around £3.0 million plus an additional £438,000 for the overall Programme Management.

Points to consider

At the Reconvened Citizens' Panels (second set of Panels), not all specialisms were represented at each location, for example, one had no NGO and two had no geologists. In the latter cases the industry representative spoke on their behalf, which many did not like. The Panels were regarded by some, including the facilitators, as lacking adequate information on the process of 'swing weighting' of options, and several participants had difficulty, some becoming frustrated or even hostile. The Reconvened Citizens' Panels were not provided with details of the MADA (Multi-Attribute Decision Analysis) process already carried out by groups of experts due to the tight CoRWM timetable. Again, many felt this was a significant failing.

Participants at the initial Panels felt that much more notice should be given for subsequent events, and that there should be more details of the terms of reference. Also, to better understand the issues, experts should be available, especially a geologist. Finally, they needed more information prior to the next event. Some of the participants in the second set of Panels felt the experts represented entrenched views and were perceived by many as biased. Many felt the 'parents evening' session was more valuable than the open panel sessions.

Further tools used in this case study

Roundtables; Expert Workshops