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POLICY-MAKERS DISCUSS THE FUTURE FOR NUCLEAR POWER IN THE OECD

Energy policy-makers from 20 OECD Member countries met in Paris to assess the long-range implications of the current trends in nuclear power for energy policy and the nuclear energy industry.

The one and half day meeting, called “Business as Usual and Nuclear Power”, draws its name from the “Business as Usual” projection of the International Energy Agency’s (IEA) publication “World Energy Outlook”. This projection suggests that if current trends continue, world nuclear power output in 2020 will remain at about the level of 1995; but as a proportion of total electricity generated, nuclear power’s share will have more than halved. Within the OECD itself, nuclear power production in 2020 will be below the level of 1995.

The meeting, organised jointly by the IEA and the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), both based in Paris, was chaired by Nemesio Fernández-Cuesta, the former Secretary of State for Energy in Spain, and currently President of one of the most important publishing groups in Spain.

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Presentations were made by officials from OECD countries with widely differing policies regarding nuclear power. A select group of industry invitees addressed the implications for industry and what they saw as the role for governments.

Among the major issues addressed were the impacts of this trend on:

- OECD energy security – particularly the diversity of fuels
- Economics of power generation and replacement sources
- Environmental implications of reduced use of nuclear power and increased use of its replacement sources
- The institutional challenges for nuclear safety regulators
- Maintaining the necessary industrial and educational infrastructure for nuclear power

The proceedings of the meeting will be published early next year.

In summarising the findings of the meeting, Mr Fernández-Cuesta said the meeting had given participants a better appreciation of the issues facing governments as they consider the most appropriate role for nuclear energy. He recognised that there is no option without hurdles or controversy. He encouraged both organisations to pursue similar joint efforts in order to stimulate informed dialogue and suggested that non-OECD countries should be brought into the process.

Robert Priddle, Executive Director of the IEA, stated that “any policy decision regarding the place of nuclear power in future energy supply must be made with full awareness of its implications for energy security, economic efficiency and environmental sustainability”.

Luis Echávarri, Director-General of the NEA, stressed that energy policy decisions need to be taken in the light of sound, informed and unbiased information on all the options available, including that of nuclear energy.

The IEA is the forum for energy co-operation among 24 OECD Member countries. The Agency maintains an emergency system for dealing with oil supply disruptions and a regular flow of information and analysis on other forms of energy. It promotes rational energy policies, the development of alternative energy sources and increased efficiency of energy use. It also works to strengthen the link between environment and energy policies, especially on the issue of climate change.

The primary objective of the NEA is to foster co-operation among the governments of its 27 Member countries in the use of nuclear power as an economic, environmentally benign and safe energy source. The main priorities of the NEA include nuclear safety and regulation, radioactive waste management, radiation protection, as well as nuclear science, economics and technology, and nuclear law and liability.