

How the Monitoring Group Envisions Its Role “Decommissioning the HZG (prev. GKSS) Nuclear Facilities”

The HZG, as operator of the nuclear research reactor* at the previous GKSS, has offered to engage in a transparent dialogue process with the public regarding the facilities' decommissioning and thereby “achieve amicable solutions to these issues within the legal framework” (from "How the Helmholtz-Zentrum Geesthacht (HZG) Envisions Its Role"). Within the framework of a continuous six month discussion, we have formed a Monitoring Group consisting of individuals from various areas of society to carry out this dialogue with the HZG.

A dialogue such as the one suggested by the HZG takes place against the backdrop that the use of nuclear energy and the associated risks have led to a deep societal division within the country rarely encountered on any other topic. Through the framework of a dialogue with the HZG, the aim is to find “common solutions”, providing the opportunity to overcome this division.

Dialogue on the Nuclear Energy Conflict?

After the Fukushima disaster, the decision was made to cease using nuclear energy in Germany.

The question of radioactive waste disposal remains unresolved. This also applies to the highly radioactive fuel rods from the nuclear research reactors operated by the previous GKSS, which have meanwhile been stored in the United States. Still no societal consensus for handling the radioactive waste exists.

For many individuals, nuclear energy also means that the security, health and environmental protection has been set aside in favour of economic and political interests. In this sense, the conflict concerning nuclear energy is a question of democracy and power. Certain problems additionally come into play at the Geesthacht location, such as the yet undetermined causes of numerous leukaemia-related illnesses in children and adolescents. Within this framework, the Monitoring Group also makes it their task to comprehensively investigate the possible causes of the leukaemia in connection with the GKSS.

Dialogue Needs Participation!

Against this backdrop, the HZG's “voluntary commitment” is to not only strive to be transparent, informative and participatory but also to achieve “amicable solutions”.

The Monitoring Group sees therein participation in the framework of legal possibilities. For them, this is the basis for the Monitoring Group to enter into a dialogue based on the decision to phase out nuclear energy.

* In 1995, the second research reactor was decommissioned, dismantled and stored on site.

The Monitoring Group is aware of the differing attitudes toward nuclear energy and the associated problems. Against this backdrop, the Monitoring Group aims to mutually make the decommissioning of the prior GKSS's nuclear facilities as safe as possible. The group wishes to find methods together for handling the radioactive material left behind.

The Monitoring Group is aware of the following: The dialogue process is provided voluntarily on the part of the HZG for which there are no legal conditions. Likewise, there is no legal framework that legitimizes the Monitoring Group, neither with regard to the public nor to the HZG. The Monitoring Group participates in the process without legal framework and without financial resources and thus does not have equal say. The group's rights in the process are based exclusively on HZG's "commitment".

Monitoring Group and the Public

The Monitoring Group works largely on a voluntary basis and is heterogeneous in terms of its composition. Members stem from different political, social and special interest areas. The group strives to coordinate procedures, expressions and decisions in the consensus. It is understood to be a counterpart to the HZG in the discussion partnership and to be a representative of the public. The group works within its capabilities to ensure transparency to the fullest extent, to ensure information is provided, and to provide opportunities for public participation.

The measures for decommissioning the research reactors in Geesthacht will be carried out after concrete examination of the facilities, discussion and a decision process. They are therefore not transferable overall to other facilities. This applies both to the fundamental question of whether dismantling or inclusion make more sense as well as to individual decisions for respective implementation of the decommissioning.

Local Action Needs Societal Consensus

The Monitoring Group is aware that it assumes great societal responsibility by engaging in dialogue with the HZG on the decommissioning of the nuclear facilities and the handling of the resulting nuclear waste. This applies not only to the region around Geesthacht but also to responsibly handling the consequences of nuclear energy overall. In this respect, the Monitoring Group also understands itself to be a part of the societal debate on responsible and consensual handling of nuclear energy consequences. The question of where and how the resulting radioactive waste from the dismantling of the prior GKSS's nuclear facilities can be permanently stored safely cannot be answered solely in Geesthacht. This requires a societal consensus!

On the basis of phasing out nuclear energy, political leaders from state and federal levels are requested to facilitate and support a comprehensive debate aimed at consensus. The nuclear research reactors of the prior GKSS are a public establishment, falling under the purview of the federal government and the states of Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Brandenburg and Lower Saxony. Nuclear supervision legally lies with the state of Schleswig-Holstein. We expect national and state political leaders in particular, to guarantee and support such societal discourse by providing resources to engage in such dialogue.

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Coordination, Representatives

In the consensus process, the Monitoring Group chooses two or three speakers for coordinating with the HZG and to serve as press and public representatives. These representatives can be recalled at any time. It is the function of the representatives to publically present the Monitoring Group's resolutions and decisions and/or joint agreements with the HZG as representatives of the Monitoring Group. Furthermore, they are tasked with bringing HZG's concerns to the attention of the Monitoring Group and/or present concerns of the Monitoring Group to the HZG.

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