

## Second Public Hearing Held on Plan to Construct Ohma NPS

On October 19, the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) held the second public hearing on the siting of the Ohma NPS (ABWR, 1,383MW) by the Electric Power Development Co. (EPDC) in Ohma Town, Aomori Prefecture. It is the first such hearing since July 2004, when Chubu Electric Power Co. held a similar one regarding the siting of Unit 3 (ABWR, 1,373MW) at the Shimane NPS.

No large protest demonstrations were held outside of the hearing venue, and the hearing itself proceeded smoothly. The 400 members of the audience who packed into the hall listened intently to the questions asked by selected persons and the explanatory responses given by the representative officials of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA). With the conclusion of the hearing, the EPDC took a major positive step toward the realization of its plan to construct the Ohma NPS.

Aomori Prefecture is in the northern part of Honshu Island, and temperatures on the day dropped to as low as 5 despite the sunshine. Despite the winter-like weather, many people lined up early in the morning outside the hall, and the hearing started promptly on time at 9:00 a.m.

Prominent officials attending the hearing this time as a group included NSC Chairman Shojiro Matsuura, and NSC Commissioners Kunio Higashi and Shizuyo Kusumi. The NSC chose 18 people in advance from 28 applicants to make specific remarks during the proceedings concerning the safety of the reactor at the Ohma NPS (one of them was absent owing to circumstances). The hearing continued with the NISA representatives giving their responses.

Many questions were raised by the attendees about the following issues: (1) the safety of Ohma NPS as a ABWR fully loaded with MOX fuel, (2) the release of radioactive substances and their impact on local marine products, such as tuna (said to be the best in all of Japan) and *konbu* dried kelp, as well as the effects of false rumors on the same, and (3) the effect of earthquakes and tsunamis on the plant

In response, as regards the safety of the plant as a full MOX-ABWR, the NISA representatives emphasized the fact that the design of the plant was firmly undergirded by experimental data from experimental reactors loaded fully with MOX. Also, they explained that there were not any safety problems, since the design was carried out in consideration of the fact that MOX fuel was to be loaded in the entire reactor core, the ABWR being the culmination of BWR technology.

As far as the other questions were concerned, the NISA sought the understanding of the hearing participants by saying: (1) the plant was designed so as to withstand the maximum predicted earthquakes and tsunamis based on a detailed investigation of the active faults in the vicinity of the plant, as well as literature on past disasters; (2) there would not be any effect on the surrounding environment owing to the construction of the nuclear power plant. Regarding the possibility of false rumors, the officials said that NISA would act quickly to announce accurate information concerning safety.

According to EPDC's plan, the Ohma NPS – which will be its first nuclear power plant – will see the beginning of construction in August 2006, and should begin commercial operation in March 2012. After the safety of the initial operation is confirmed, the ratio of MOX fuel loaded in the plant will be gradually stepped up until the entire reactor core is loaded with MOX fuel.

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