

Work Begins to Revise National Basic Energy Plan

On July 26, the sixth meeting was held of the Coordination Subcommittee under the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy, at which work was begun toward revising the Japanese government's Basic Energy Plan. Of the points agreed upon for inclusion in a draft, support was demonstrated by the subcommittee for defining nuclear power as a key power source and strengthening various measures under the current Basic Energy Plan, including the nuclear fuel cycle policy. Those matters will be addressed in detail by a working committee on the Basic Energy Plan, which will be established under the Coordination Subcommittee by the end of September. The final revision is slated to be approved by the Cabinet in early December.

The Basic Energy Plan, which lays out the direction and concepts of Japan's energy policies for the next decade or so, is revised at least every three years. Prior to above meeting of the Coordination Subcommittee, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE) issued the New National Energy Strategy in May 2006, incorporating numerical targets extending to 2030, and focusing on key measures. The present revision of the Basic Energy Plan will take into consideration both that strategy and the Cabinet's plan, approved in April 2005, to achieve the targets of the Kyoto Protocol.

The draft will consist of four chapters – the basic policy, long-term measures, technological development and necessary items. The current plan also contains the same four chapters.

In reference to nuclear power, the draft advocates the construction of additional nuclear power units so as to “realize the most advanced energy-supply-and-demand structure in the world” (as stated as part of the long-term measures), amidst a general environment of power deregulation, the steady promotion of the nuclear fuel cycle, and the early commercialization of the FBR cycle. Also, the related measures in the current plan will be reinforced. Ongoing efforts will also be redoubled to achieve bilateral understanding with the public, as well as to establish greater trust between the national government and local communities. Other measures to be promoted include establishing technologies and securing human resources, supporting the international development of the nuclear industry, cooperating in the creation of an international framework, determining final disposal sites for high-level radioactive waste (HLW), and independently developing uranium resources.

As for technological development, the draft also takes up such matters as promoting the use of nuclear power and ensuring its safety, and taking an extensive approach to promotion of nuclear fusion, including the ITER program.

At the July 26 meeting, committee members raised several concerns, including one person who said, “It should be made clear that putting top emphasis on energy security is the main difference between the new plan and the current one.” Meanwhile, someone else said, “The draft should mention the need to prepare now for the replacement of existing reactors, and to decide upon a final HLW disposal site.”

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