

Revised Basic Energy Plan to Place Clear Emphasis on Nuclear Power

On September 7, the Basic Energy Plan Subcommittee of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's (METI's) Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy's Coordination Subcommittee held its first meeting, at which members deliberated on the revised proposal for the Basic Energy Plan as submitted by the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE). The revision is much more detailed than the current Basic Energy Plan, and places a clearer emphasis than ever before on the following points: (1) boosting the share accounted for by nuclear in total energy generation over the medium-range and long-range future, (2) establishing the nuclear fuel cycle as early as possible and strategically reinforcing related industries, and (3) realizing the fast breeder reactor (FBR) at an early date. The working committee plans to wrap up its proposed revisions in the early part of October, and release it for public comment.

The broad outline of the proposed revision is basically the same as the current one, consisting of four chapters: basic policies, long-term measures and policies, technological development, and necessary items. At the outset, it demonstrates the perception that "it is more important than ever before for Japan to secure a stable supply [of energy]." As far as the environment matter is concerned, it states, "Nuclear power is the key to achieving an integrated solution to the problems of security and global warming."

As for long-term policies, the text in the revised plan concerning nuclear power was greatly enhanced insofar as the "development, introduction and utilization of a variety of energies" are concerned. Whereas the current plan is composed of just four sections – the position of nuclear power, public understanding, the establishment of the nuclear fuel cycle, and the simultaneous pursuit of deregulation and energy development – the revised plan contains nine: (1) clarifying the position of nuclear power, (2) assuring the coexistence of nuclear power with local communities nationwide, (3) increasing the share of nuclear power in overall power generation compared with current levels, (4) establishing the nuclear fuel cycle as early as possible and strategically reinforcing related industries, (5) realizing the fast breeder reactor (FBR) at an early date, (6) actively participating in international frameworks, (7) fostering human resources, (8) supporting the overseas activities by the domestic Japanese nuclear industry, and (9) promoting measures for waste materials.

Each of the items goes into considerable detail, premised on the aim to make Japan a nuclear energy powerhouse. As pertains the nuclear fuel cycle, from the perspective of securing a stable supply of energy, uranium enrichment and reprocessing are viewed as necessary in order to develop a domestic industrial base that is of sufficient scale so as to be internationally competitive. The revised plan went on to say that efforts should be accelerated to include nuclear power as an object of the clean development mechanism (CDM) scheme in international frameworks.

At the meeting, members raised several comments about the revised plan, with one person saying that the plan "can be highly acclaimed as the linchpin of Japan's nuclear power policies, including the nuclear fuel cycle. With the overriding premise of safety assurance, we ought to proceed along the lines of the measures laid forth in the plan." Someone else then mentioned that "hydrogen only becomes meaningful insofar as it is produced through nuclear power. We ought not just to make reference to nuclear power but also touch specifically on such things as fast breeder reactors (FBRs) and high-temperature gas-cooled reactors (HTGRs)."

Editor: Noriyuki Ishii, JAIF