

Aomori Gov. Mimura Confers with METI Minister in Tokyo, Reconfirming Nuclear Fuel Policy

On November 27, Gov. Shingo Mimura of Aomori Prefecture paid a visit to the offices of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) in Tokyo, calling upon Minister Akira Amari and other officials. His purpose was to reconfirm the national government's nuclear fuel-cycle policy, as well as to call upon the government to enhance its efforts dealing with high-level radioactive waste (HLW) disposal. Minister Amari responded by affirming the government's unwavering commitment to its medium-range and long-term nuclear policies, while keeping in mind the goal to develop local economies, among others.

To this point, Gov. Mimura has made separate confirmations of the government's nuclear policies at each relevant juncture (e.g., the change in government, etc.). With the launch of the cabinet of the new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the most recent conference with the METI Minister was aimed at clarifying whether policies would remain unchanged under the new administration. This was the first time that Gov. Mimura had met Minister Amari.

The governor particularly asked about four points, calling for an enhancement of each: (1) the promotion of the nuclear fuel-cycle policy, (2) the approach toward handling HLW disposal, (3) the engagement of the national government in the quality-assurance programs run by facility operators, and (4) enhancement of public relations (PR) efforts and public-hearing activities.

As regards the nuclear fuel cycle, Gov. Mimura received confirmation from Minister Amari that the basic policy of the government was to reprocess the entire amount of spent fuel. He then requested that efforts be made to promote the MOX-use program, and to boost the development of related technologies, including the building of a second reprocessing facility. He voiced his concern of the people of Aomori prefecture about the location of the site of final HLW disposal, and called upon the government and others to make redoubled efforts to secure such a site. Furthermore, he called upon the government to make proper guidance toward the strengthening of the quality-assurance programs run by operators, as well as the enhancement of programs to train personnel. Insofar as the enhancement of PR and public hearings is concerned, Gov. Mimura cited specific examples of what could be done, such as stressing the need for the nuclear fuel-cycle policy and the radiation safety of the facilities.

In response to the governor's comments, Minister Amari first expressed his respect for the substantial amount of cooperation extended by Aomori Prefecture so far in hosting the reprocessing plant and other facilities. He then went on to say, "The national nuclear fuel-cycle policy has been reiterated in the government's recent plan to make Japan a nuclear energy powerhouse. R&D will be pursued unwaveringly over both the medium range and long term, with due regard given to safety assurance and local economic promotion." Regarding HLW waste, also, he said, "We have not changed our promises to Aomori Prefecture. The national government shall act in an integrated manner with the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NUMO) and electric power companies to select the final disposal site at the earliest possible date."

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