

Proposal Ready on Revision to Basic Energy Plan

On December 7, the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy's Coordination Subcommittee held its 7th meeting to prepare its proposal on revision of Japan's Basic Energy Plan.

The first viewpoint from which the revision will be made is the need for active promotion of nuclear power to realize an energy structure that is independent and in harmony with the environment. The nuclear-related content of individual policies should be substantially enhanced to realize the "Plan to Make Japan a Nuclear Energy Powerhouse." In mid-December, the subcommittee will make the proposal available to the public for comments, and then deliberate on a final version. Next February, the final proposal will be decided by the Cabinet.

Viewpoints from which to revise the current plan, issued three years ago, are the needs to: (1) actively promote nuclear power and steadily expand new energies; (2) actively carry out resource diplomacy; (3) take the lead within international frameworks on energy conservation and global warming; and (4) further strengthen technological capabilities.

The first chapter of the proposal – basic policies – states the importance of nuclear power in respect of energy security and notes the global trend toward nuclear power promotion. On environmental compatibility, it says, "Nuclear power is the key to solving the problems of energy security and global warming together."

The second chapter – systematic measures – calls for concerted efforts by the government toward the early establishment of the fuel cycle, including the MOX-use Program. It also sets a target of developing commercial fast breeder reactors (FBRs) prior to 2050. On assisting the nuclear industry in its international expansion, it says, "In light of the agreement by the G8 last July that 'nuclear utilization will contribute to dealing with global issues, including energy security and climate change,' Japan will strive to promote extensive discussions on the international stage so as to include nuclear power in the clean development mechanism (CDM) scheme."

Members raised various opinions, with one person saying, "I highly evaluate these nuclear policies. We should work hard to have the 'Plan to Make Japan a Nuclear Energy Powerhouse' more widely understood and effective." Another member said, "The 'nuclear energy powerhouse' plan should be made better known among the public throughout Japan." Meanwhile, someone else pointed out, "Unless the NPT regime is rebuilt in the next decade, we may not be able to continue using nuclear power."

In the basic plan, nuclear power is referred to as a "key power source," and coal-fired power as a "base-load power source." The members also exchanged opinions on that terminology. Director General Takashi Funaki of the Electricity and Gas Industry Dept. of the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE) explained that the term "key power source" was used with the intended nuance that it was more important – i.e., the main power source.

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