COMMISSION OPINION

of 30 April 1992

concerning the nuclear fuel reprocessing plant Thorp of the Sellafield establishment (United Kingdom)

(92/269/Euratom)

The General Data concerning the plan for the disposal of radioactive waste from the thermal oxide nuclear fuel reprocessing plant Thorp located at the BNFL Sellafield site were provided by the United Kingdom Government to the Commission, in accordance with Article 37 of the Euratom Treaty, by letter received on 7 October 1991. In practice, the Thorp General Data incorporate those for the associated waste encapsulation plant EP2 and the latter installation has been included in the examination of the data.

On the occasion of the meeting of the group of experts set up pursuant to the Treaty, which took place from 3 to 5 February 1992, in Cumbria, the representatives of the United Kingdom Government provided further complementary information and details.

On the basis of the data thus obtained on Thorp (taken below to include EP2) and having consulted the group of experts, the Commission drew up the following opinion :

1. The distance from Thorp to Ireland, the nearest other Member State, is 180 kilometres.

2. Exports of locally produced foodstuffs, including seafoods, are of minor importance.

3. In normal operation the discharges of gaseous and liquid radioactive effluents foreseen for Thorp will not be liable to cause exposure, significant from the point of view of health, of members of the population of another Member State, taking into account all exposure pathways including, in particular, the consumption of seafoods.

   While the United Kingdom authorities are not in a position at this point in time to quantify possible revisions to the Sellafield discharge authorizations to take account of both the anticipated Thorp and the other radioactive effluents from the site, any such revisions should be able to ensure that exposure in other Member States will be of no significance from the point of view of health. Moreover, it is recognized that discharges into the Irish Sea are not confined to those from the Sellafield site but taking account of these additional discharges would not alter this conclusion.

4. Solid radioactive waste resulting from Thorp operations will be stored on the site pending disposal to authorized facilities.

5. In the case of unplanned discharges of radioactive substances which might arise in the accident conditions considered in the General Data submitted by the United Kingdom Government, doses liable to be received in other Member States will not be significant from the point of view of health.

In conclusion, the Commission is of the opinion that the implementation of the plan for the disposal of radioactive waste from Thorp at the Sellafield establishment is not liable, either in normal operation or in the case of an accident of the type and magnitude considered in the General Data, to result in radioactive contamination, significant from the point of view of health, of the water, soil or airspace of another Member State.

Nevertheless, it is recommended that the existing bilateral arrangements between the respective competent authorities for the transmission of information subsequent to a nuclear accident be substantiated in a formal bilateral agreement between the United Kingdom and Irish Governments as a matter of urgency. In this regard, the Commission would draw attention to the recommendation in its Opinions of 26 February 1987 (1), and of 12 June 1987 (2), on the plans for the disposal of radioactive waste from Heysham 2 nuclear power station and Torness nuclear power station respectively.

For the Commission
Carlo RIPA DI MEANA
Member of the Commission

(1) OJ No L 68, 12. 3. 1987, p. 33.
(2) OJ No L 189, 9. 7. 1987, p. 42.