

March 21, 2001

Commander Rodney M. Adams
345 Waterford Circle East
Tarpon Springs, FL 34689

Dear Commander Adams:

I am responding to your communication of February 1, 2001, to Representative Michael Bilirakis, which he forwarded to Dennis K. Rathbun of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. You expressed a concern to Representative Bilirakis about a comment by an NRC staff member you overheard at the January 31, 2001, public meeting with Exelon. You stated that the staff member implied that there was "not a chance" that the NRC will devote the necessary resources to move expeditiously.

The January 31st meeting with Exelon was an opportunity for the NRC to learn more about the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR) design, focusing on various technical and licensing issues. It also provided a forum for Exelon to express its needs and expectations. Exelon's objectives as stated at the meeting were to (1) provide an overview of Exelon's involvement; (2) provide a summary of the PBMR design and potential licensing issues; (3) provide preliminary ideas on a licensing approach and schedule; (4) provide the near term goals; and (5) begin a dialogue to reach agreement on process, schedule and resources.

I assure you that NRC will be responsive to any serious industry initiative to license new nuclear power plants, including the PBMR design, consistent with the bounds of our statutory mandate and funding. Recently, the Commission has specifically instructed the staff "to assess the related technical, licensing, and inspection capabilities for advanced reactors, including the PBMR, and to identify enhancements, if any, that would be necessary to ensure that the agency can effectively carry out its responsibilities associated with early site permit application, a license application, and the construction of a new power plant." The Commission also instructed staff to critically assess the regulatory infrastructure supporting Title 10 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 50 "Domestic Licensing of Production and Utilization Facilities" and 52 "Early Site Permits; Standard Design Certifications; and Combined Licenses for Nuclear Power Plants" and to identify where enhancements, if any, are necessary. The staff will provide the Commission a schedule and resource estimates for completing these tasks.

Consistent with the Commission guidance and the NRC's advanced reactor policy, we also encourage pre-application dialog, such as was done with Exelon, to help identify key issues before the actual review begins. I hope this information provides reassurance that the staff is already engaged in activities that address your concern and I can assure you that NRC is committed to respond to potential applicants in a timely and responsive way.

Sincerely,

/RA/

William D. Travers
Executive Director
for Operations

cc: Representative Michael Bilirakis

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Sincerely,

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William D. Travers
Executive Director
for Operations

cc: Representative Michael Bilirakis

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* Precisely concurred.

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