

January 18, 2005

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION**

DOCKETED
USNRC

BEFORE THE ATOMIC SAFETY AND LICENSING BOARD

January 18, 2005 (1:19 pm)

OFFICE OF SECRETARY
RULEMAKINGS AND
ADJUDICATIONS STAFF

In the Matter of

Docket No. 70-3103

Louisiana Energy Services, L.P.
National Enrichment Facility

ASLBP No. 04-826-01-ML

**RESPONSE ON BEHALF OF
NUCLEAR INFORMATION AND RESOURCE SERVICE AND PUBLIC CITIZEN TO
LES MOTION TO EXCLUDE PORTIONS OF PREFILED DIRECT TESTIMONY OF
GEORGE RICE, ARJUN MAKHIJANI, MICHAEL SHEEHAN, AND CHARLES
KOMANOFF AS IRRELEVANT**

Preliminary statement

This Memorandum is submitted on behalf of Intervenors Nuclear Information and Resource Service and Public Citizen ("NIRS/PC") in opposition to the Motion of Applicant, Louisiana Energy Services, L.P. ("LES") to Exclude Portions of Prefiled Direct Testimony of NIRS/PC Witnesses George Rice, Arjun Makhijani, Michael Sheehan, and Charles Komanoff as Irrelevant, filed on January 12, 2005.

Argument

LES argues that portions of the testimony of four expert witnesses proffered by NIRS/PC should be excluded from consideration. We deal with LES's arguments in the order presented. In each case, LES has sought to impose a strained and distorted interpretation upon the contentions before the Atomic Safety and Licensing board (the

“Board”), in an attempt to exclude evidence that would, in fact, assist the board to evaluate the contentions that the Board has admitted.

a. LES’s objection to the testimony of George Rice.

George Rice, a professional hydrologist, has presented 26 pages of prefiled direct testimony. LES objects that one paragraph, concerning a water-bearing layer present at the site of the National Enrichment Facility at a depth of 600 feet, should be stricken. (LES Mot. 2-3). In that paragraph Mr. Rice states that LES and the Commission Staff have failed to answer basic questions about this layer, such as its areal extent, conductivity, water quality, and flow characteristics. (Rice prefiled testimony at 8-9). As background, it should be noted that the contention originally admitted in this case as to ground water impacts states as follows:

CONTENTION: Petitioners contend that the Environmental Report contained in the application does not contain a complete or adequate assessment of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project on ground and surface water, contrary to the requirements of 10 C.F.R. 51.45.

The bases set forth in the Petition include the following:

“A. Basis: In this situation, the ER has several serious shortcomings: The ER fails to demonstrate that there has been any evaluation of the fate of waste waters and runoff that enter the subsurface at the NEF. To determine where this water will go, LES should answer the following questions:

* * *

b. Where would water flowing along the alluvial/Chinle contact be discharged?

c. How long would it take for water from the NEF to reach the discharge area?

d. Are there subsurface fractures or other fast pathways that would allow water to flow rapidly from the alluvium to the Chinle, or from the Chinle to the Santa Rosa?

* * *

e. LES also should have determined the ages of water in the Chinle and Santa Rosa. Relatively young water would indicate that water reaches these units along fast flow paths.”

The Board ruled as to this contention that it be “[a]dmitted, as supported by bases sufficient to raise genuine issues of material fact adequate to warrant further inquiry.” (Memorandum and Order, July 19, 2004, at 28).

The aquifer at the 600 foot point would occur within the Chinle Formation, which is present at the site beneath alluvial strata and overlies the Santa Rosa Aquifer. (ER 3.3-2). The Santa Rosa is at approximately 1100 feet below ground surface. (Rice prefiled testimony at 4). The Board has ruled that NIRS/PC have raised genuine issues of material fact as to the pathway to be followed by water (a) flowing along the alluvial/Chinle contact, (b) flowing through possible fractures from the alluvium to the Chinle, (c) flowing through possible fractures from the Chinle to the Santa Rosa. The Board also held it relevant to determine the ages of water in the Chinle and the Santa Rosa. Within the scope of that ruling, the testimony offered by Mr. Rice simply points out that among the rock bodies present in the zones that the Board has allowed NIRS/PC to assert should have been investigated is a water bearing zone at the 600 foot point that should be investigated for its presence and flow characteristics and to determine what chemicals are present in the water. Such testimony is clearly relevant to the admitted contention that asserts failure to resolve important hydrologic issues.

Indeed, within the scope of the admitted contention EC-1, expert witnesses for LES have pointed out the existence of the water-bearing layer at 600 feet. (LES direct testimony on NIRS/PC Contention EC-1, at 14). LES states in that testimony that “LES has not conducted local investigations of those water-bearing units due to their great depths and the thickness and low permeability of the overlying Chinle Formation red beds.” (id.). LES’s witnesses, not unexpectedly, do not agree with NIRS/PC’s witness on the need to

investigate the stratum at 600 feet. But the Board has admitted contention EC-1, which addresses the sufficiency of the subsurface investigation, and NIRS/PC should be allowed to present expert testimony on the question.

LES claims that the Board excluded the testimony in issue in its November 22, 2004, ruling on late-filed contentions. (LES Mot. 2-3). In that decision, the Board stated that proposed Basis E lacked sufficient support. (Memorandum and Order, Nov. 22, 2004, at 11). However, the testimony in issue here, advanced by a qualified hydrologist, goes beyond stating unanswered questions and specifically identifies conductivity, chemical quality, and magnitude and direction of flow as the characteristics of the rock body needing investigation in connection with contention EC-1. Such specific statements were not contained in the basis rejected by the Board. The testimony should be allowed.

b. LES's objection to the testimony of Arjun Makhijani.

LES would have the Board reject testimony by Dr. Arjun Makhijani supporting contention EC-4. This contention states that LES and the Commission Staff in the ER and the DEIS have failed to disclose the environmental impact of processes used to deconvert depleted uranium hexafluoride ("DUF₆") to a more stable form for disposal:

NIRS/PC EC-4 -- IMPACTS OF WASTE STORAGE

CONTENTION: Petitioners contend that the Louisiana Energy Services, L.P. Environmental Report (ER) lacks adequate information to make an informed licensing judgment, contrary to the requirements of 10 C.F.R. Part 51. The ER fails to discuss the environmental impacts of construction and lifetime operation of a conversion plant for the Depleted Uranium Hexafluoride ("UF₆") waste that is required in conjunction with the proposed enrichment plant.

The DEIS fails to discuss the environmental impacts of the construction and operation of a conversion plant for the depleted uranium hexafluoride waste. The DEIS entirely relies upon final EISs issued in connection with the construction of two conversion plants at Paducah, Kentucky, and Portsmouth, Ohio, that will convert the Department of Energy's inventory of depleted uranium (DEIS at 2-28,

2-30, 4-53, 4-54). Such reliance is erroneous, because the DOE plants are unlike the private conversion plant contemplated by LES.

Dr. Makhijani's testimony points out that there is no discussion in the ER or the DEIS of alternatives to the conversion product selected by the Department of Energy ("DOE") for production at the Paducah and Portsmouth conversion plants, which is U_3O_8 . Among the alternative conversion products is UO_2 . The applicable regulations require an ER and a DEIS to consider appropriate alternatives for achieving the aims of the project. (10 CFR 51.45(b)(3), (c); 51.71(a), (d)). DOE has sought to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of different disposal forms, including uranium metal, DUF_4 , DU_3O_8 , and DUO_2 . (See Croff, A.G., et al., Assessment of Preferred Depleted Uranium Disposal Forms, ORNL/TM-2000/161 (June 2000)). Dr. Makhijani's testimony points out that from the standpoint of disposal performance UO_2 may be superior to U_3O_8 . (Makhijani prefiled direct testimony at 8, 10-11, 14). The analysis of the impacts of deconversion logically should include the impacts of deconversion to different waste forms, including the environmental impacts from processing to produce such form and the impacts from disposal of alternative forms, to enable the decision makers to select the environmentally preferable alternative.

However, LES would apparently delete any reference to disposal performance in Dr. Makhijani's testimony, contending that it is outside the scope of contention EC-4. (LES Mot. 4). The difficulty with this approach is that, as is well known, the purpose of deconversion of DUF_6 is to generate a suitable form for disposal. (See LES prefiled direct testimony concerning NIRS/PC Contention EC-4 at 4). That being the case, it is not possible even to determine which deconversion form is an "appropriate alternative" without information on its disposal performance. Present information indicates that

DU₃O₈, and DUO₂ are at least in the running, but there is no EIS analysis of the performance of DUO₂ for disposal, and the analysis in the DEIS of the performance of DU₃O₈ has no technical explanation and cannot be given credence. (See Makhijani prefiled direct testimony at 12).

LES urges that the Board rejected any information on disposal issues in its ruling on proposed new contentions. (LES Mot. 3). This is inaccurate. In that ruling, the Board stated that it had excluded various contentions involving the disposal of depleted uranium in light of the pendency of the waste classification issue before the Commission. (Memorandum and Order, Nov. 22, 2004, at 16). However, the Board did not indicate that the disposal performance of different waste forms could not be considered in evaluating the impact of alternative deconversion strategies. It is quite appropriate to consider the proposed disposal location and the degree of isolation to be afforded the DU waste form in projecting its performance. See *State of Minnesota Pollution Control Agency v. NRC*, 602 F.2d 412 (D.C. Cir. 1979). The fact that other studies may have examined alternative disposal forms (LES prefiled testimony on NIRS/PC Contention EC-4) does not allow alternatives to be eliminated in the DEIS, since “these studies were not made part of the EIS and so invocation of them cannot alone ‘permit a reasoned choice of alternatives.’” *Chelsea Neighborhood Associations v. U.S. Postal Service*, 516 F.2d 378, 389 (2d Cir. 1975).

Finally, LES tells the Board that it is irrelevant that there are no general DOE guidelines governing the free release of contaminated HF or CaF₂. (LES Mot. 4). However, it is precisely such factors that determine the fate and impact of products of deconversion. As Dr. Makhijani’s testimony makes clear, the contaminant load in products such as HF or CaF₂ determines whether they are destined for resale and general

distribution or, alternatively, consigned to disposal as waste. (Makhijani prefiled direct testimony at 22-23). Such factors determine the environmental impact of different deconversion strategies and cannot be excluded from the record.

c. LES's objection to the testimony of Michael F. Sheehan

LES objects to Dr. Sheehan's testimony in its entirety. Briefly, Dr. Sheehan, speaking as an economic expert, shows that the effect of the introduction of the proposed NEF into the United States is likely to be the replacement of one domestic source of enrichment capacity—United States Enrichment Corporation ("USEC")—with a new entity controlled by Urenco, a foreign supplier. LES objects that such testimony should not be considered by the Board and the Commission as they weigh the costs and benefits of the proposed NEF project.

It is important to view LES's objection in the light of the contention that has been admitted. The text of contention EC-7 addresses the inadequacy of the cost-benefit analysis:

NIRS/PC EC-7 -- NEED FOR THE FACILITY

CONTENTION: Petitioners contend that the Environmental Report (ER) does not adequately describe or weigh the environmental, social, and economic impacts and costs of operating the National Enrichment Facility (See ER 1.1.1 et seq.) in that:

- (A) Louisiana Energy Services, L.P.'s (LES) presentation erroneously assumes that there is a shortage of enrichment capacity.
- (B) LES's statements of "need" for the LES plant (ER 1.1) depend primarily upon global projections of need rather than projections of need for enrichment services in the U.S.
- (C) LES has referred to supply and demand in the uranium enrichment market (ER 1.1), but it has not shown how LES would effectively enter this market in the face of existing and anticipated competitors and contribute some public benefit.

In explaining this contention, NIRS/PC had stated as bases, inter alia, (A) that it is an error to assume a shortage of enrichment capacity and that the EIS should explore alternative means to satisfy the need for enriched uranium, (B) that the EIS should investigate the impacts of alternative means of supplying enriched uranium to U.S. utilities and the proportion of the U.S. demand that the NEF would serve and (F) that the EIS should explore how LES would enter the market in the face of existing and anticipated competitors and contribute some public benefit, considering the costs faced by the market participants. (NIRS/PC Petition 39-41 (April 6, 2004); Reply 19—20 (May 10, 2004)). Commission Staff agreed with the admission of this contention as supported by such bases. (Commission Staff Answer 16-18 (May 3, 2004). NIRS/PC further argued to the Board that “NEPA is generally regarded as calling for some sort of weighing of the environmental costs against the economic, technical, or other public benefits of a proposal.” In re *Louisiana Energy Services, L.P.* (Claiborne Enrichment Center), CLI-98-3, 47 NRC 77, 88 (1998). Such analysis of “public benefits” cannot be limited to economic impacts and should account for a range of benefits sought by national policy. (*LES*, 47 NRC at 95-96). Moreover, the EIS must “to the fullest extent practicable, quantify the various factors considered.” 10 CFR § 51.71(d). The EIS must “indicate what other interests and considerations of Federal policy, including factors not related to environmental quality if applicable, are relevant to consideration of environmental effects.” 10 CFR § 51.71(d). (NIRS/PC Reply at 18 (May 10, 2004)). Based upon that record, the Board admitted this contention as to such bases. (Memorandum and Order at 32 (July 19, 2004)).

It is recognized that NEPA requires an analysis of the costs and benefits of a proposed action. The statute calls upon the Commission to “insure that presently

unquantified environmental amenities and values may be given appropriate consideration in decisionmaking along with economic and technical considerations” (42 USC 4332(2)(B)), and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality call for a cost benefit analysis of a formal or informal nature. 40 CFR 1502.23.

Here, LES has presented a lengthy interpretation of the benefits of the advent of the NEF to users of enrichment services, i.e., in furnishing a second domestic source of enrichment services, offering competition with USEC, and advancing national security objectives. (ER 1.1.1, 1.1.2). The DEIS in turn contains a discussion of the need to be satisfied by the project. (DEIS at 1-2 through 1-5). The DEIS refers to forecasts of U.S. enrichment requirements and states:

“The two forecasts indicate a need for additional uranium enrichment capability to ensure national security.

* * *

Purchasers of enrichment services view diversity and security of supply as vital from a commercial perspective (LES, 2004). The proposed NEF would supplement the domestic sources of enrichment services provided by USEC’s Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant and the proposed American Centrifuge Plant. Beginning production in 2008 and achieving full production output by 2013, the proposed NEF would provide roughly 25 percent of the current and projected U.S. enrichment services demand (EIA, 2004a; EIA 2003b).” (DEIS at 1-4, 1-5).

Thus, the ER and DEIS conclude that the outcome of licensing the NEF would be (a) to ensure national security, (b) to provide a second domestic enrichment supplier to supplement the two plants operated by USEC, and (c) to serve roughly 25 percent of the demand by U.S. users of enrichment. Thus, LES and the Commission Staff have undertaken to assert, and to quantify, the benefits of the proposed project.

In such circumstances, courts have interpreted NEPA and its implementing regulations to require an accurate consideration of likely economic and other impacts of a proposed action. For example, in *Hughes River Watershed Conservancy v. Glickman*, 81 F.3d

437, 446 (4th Cir. 1996), the agency had relied upon an inflated estimate of the economic benefits of construction of a dam, and the court held that the NEPA analysis was invalid:

“Misleading economic assumptions can defeat the first function of an EIS by impairing the agency’s consideration of the adverse environmental impacts of a proposed project. . . . NEPA requires agencies to balance a project’s economic benefits against its adverse environmental effects. . . . The use of inflated economic benefits in this balancing process may result in approval of a project that otherwise would not have been approved because of its adverse environmental effects. Similarly, misleading economic assumptions can also defeat the second function of an EIS by skewing the public’s evaluation of a project.”

Likewise, in *Sierra Club v. Sigler*, 695 F.2d 957, 979 (5th Cir. 1983), the court directed that any EIS discussion of the economic benefits of a proposal must include prospective costs:

“However, once the Corps chose to trumpet the benefits of bulk cargo activities in the EIS as a ‘selling point’ for the oil project, it rendered a decision that these activities were imminent. NEPA therefore required full disclosure and analysis of their costs. . . . The Corps cannot tip the scales of an EIS by promoting possible benefits while ignoring their costs. Simple logic, fairness, and the premises of cost-benefit analysis, let alone NEPA, demand that a cost-benefit analysis be carried out objectively. There can be no ‘hard look’ at costs and benefits unless all costs are disclosed.”

In a word, “NEPA mandates a rather finely tuned and ‘systematic’ balancing analysis in each instance.” *Chelsea Neighborhood Associations v. U.S. Postal Service*, 516 F.2d 378, 387 (2d Cir. 1975).

The testimony by Dr. Sheehan responds to this requirement of NEPA. He shows that there are economic and environmental costs likely to ensue from the licensing of the NEF that are not accounted for in the ER and the DEIS, and whose omission means that a decision based upon the ER or the DEIS would be based upon “misleading economic assumptions,” *Hughes River*, 81 F.3d at 446.

LES argues that the Board has ruled out any evidence designed to set the record straight as to the supposed benefits of the NEF. (LES Mot. 5). The assertion is made that,

in ruling out consideration of the “business case” or profitability of the proposed NEF, the Board has excluded any NEPA consideration of the public consequences of licensing the NEF. Such a decision, of course, would constitute legal error under the caselaw cited above and similar rulings.

Moreover, LES’s argument misses the point: Dr. Sheehan’s testimony does not address the profitability of the NEF project nor the validity of LES’s business planning. There is not a word in his testimony that criticizes LES’s assessments of its future success. Dr. Sheehan’s testimony addresses the claimed *public* benefits of the NEF project, such as the assumed advent of a second, competitive source of enrichment services; the asserted contributions to national security, diversity of supply, and security of supply; and the forecast that the NEF would supply 25 percent of U.S. requirements. LES and Commission Staff cannot be heard to “trumpet the benefits” (695 F.2d at 979) of the proposed NEF without being called to account for their misleading claims.

LES asserts that Dr. Sheehan’s testimony exceeds the scope of the admitted contentions. (LES Mot. 6-7). But there is an admitted contention here, addressing whether “LES would effectively enter this market in the face of existing and anticipated competitors and contribute some public benefit.” (NIRS/PC contention EC-7, Basis C). Such inquiry involves examination of the costs imposed by such a plant as well as its benefits. NIRS/PC stated in their Petition:

“LES has not provided the Commission with any information regarding the current costs of SWUs to present and expected market participants; the cost of the proposed NEF SWU production—including all costs related to construction, operation, decommissioning and UF₆ waste disposal—nor market projections; and thus has not demonstrated how construction of the proposed facility would satisfy any alleged need.” (NIRS/PC Pet. at 40-41, April 6, 2004).

In their Reply, NIRS/PC stated further that LES must show all the costs that the new plant would impose, so that the Commission can judge whether the benefits outweigh the cost:

“Before seeking a license, LES presumably studied the costs of other suppliers and the responsiveness of customers to price and other factors, to satisfy itself that utilities would buy SWUs from the NEF. The NEPA analysis underlies NRC’s decision whether to license this plant. If NRC is to make an informed decision, it must know the benefits of this project, viz: whether the project will produce SWUs better, faster, or cheaper—with the benefits quantified—than others can do.” (NIRS/PC Reply 20, May 10, 2004).

In admitting the contention, the Board stated that LES is not obligated to present a “business plan” (Memorandum and Order, July 19, 2004, at 32) but otherwise recognized a “genuine material dispute.” Thus, Dr. Sheehan’s testimony about, e.g., forthcoming competition with USEC or other suppliers, the possible impact of USEC’s failure, and the costs of groundwater contamination or the failure of LES’s waste disposal plans (LES Mot. 6-7) all concerns the costs of the proposed NEF, which are directly relevant to whether LES can “effectively enter this market in the face of existing and anticipated competitors and contribute some public benefit.” The motion in limine should be denied.

d. LES’s objections to the testimony of Charles Komanoff.

Charles Komanoff has presented a rigorous economic analysis, based upon LES’s own computerized market studies, that shows that there is in fact no shortage of enrichment capacity to serve the needs of utilities. (Komanoff prefiled direct testimony, Jan. 7, 2005). Such a demonstration comes squarely within the bounds of contention EC-7, one basis of which is that “Louisiana Energy Services, L.P.’s (LES) presentation erroneously assumes that there is a shortage of enrichment capacity.” LES nevertheless wants Mr. Komanoff’s testimony excluded, because it is not the kind of evidence that LES would like to face. LES states that it would be acceptable if Mr. Komanoff challenged

LES's claim of need for 3 million SWU of enrichment capacity, but to do so by showing that one substitute for such capacity is to purchase more U_3O_8 exceeds LES's tolerance. (LES Mot. 8).

LES's argument might make sense in a Soviet-style command economy, in which the existence of a "shortage" is determined by government administrators. But in the United States there is a flexible market economy. In that economy, utilities may substitute uranium for enrichment services, based upon the relative prices. (Komanoff prefiled direct testimony at 11, Jan. 7, 2005). Mr. Komanoff has shown that the supposed "need" for enrichment can and will be addressed by market adjustments that bring additional U_3O_8 into the system. To be sure, such evidence suggests an additional alternative that should be considered (LES Mot. 9); it also directly supports NIRS/PC's contention that the asserted shortage cannot be assumed.

LES objects that Mr. Komanoff's testimony fails to suggest a "reasonable" alternative (LES Mot. 9), since it falls outside the claimed "need" for additional enrichment capacity. But NIRS/PC are contending that LES's, and Commission Staff's, discussion of "need" is erroneous, and the Board has admitted such contention. (Memorandum and Order, July 19, 2004, at 32). It is established that an agency may not define a proposal so narrowly that it forecloses consideration of reasonable alternatives. *Davis v. Mineta*, 302 F.3d 1104, 1119 (10th Cir. 2002). The evidence addresses the need issue. The motion in limine should be denied.

Conclusion

The testimony offered by the witnesses for NIRS/PC is directly relevant to the contentions that the Board has set for hearing. No support should be given to LES's efforts

to restate the contentions admitted by the Board to narrow the matters in issue. The motion should be denied.

Respectfully submitted,



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January 18, 2005

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

Pursuant to 10 CFR § 2.305 the undersigned attorney of record certifies that on January 18, 2005, the foregoing Response on behalf of Nuclear Information and Resource Service and Public Citizen to LES Motion to Exclude Portions of Prefiled Direct Testimony of George Rice, Arjun Makhijani, Michael Sheehan, and Charles Komanoff as Irrelevant was served by electronic mail and by first class mail upon the following:

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