

Japan: Pro-nuclear power secret meetings uncovered

Friday 22 June 2012, by [Mainichi Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 19 June 2012).

Contents

- [Experts at secret meeting](#)
- [JAEC handed nuclear policy](#)
- [JAEC had secret 'study meeting](#)
- ['Secret meeting' on fuel \(...\)](#)
- [Atomic commission chief \(...\)](#)
- [Mainichi uncovers more secret](#)

Experts at secret meeting decided to cover up scenario for dealing with spent nuclear fuel

Pro-nuclear power experts who gathered at secret meetings in March organized by the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) decided to conceal a scenario for dealing with spent nuclear fuel which would be unfavorable to the promotion of fast-breeder reactors, from a subcommittee, it has been learned.

JAEC, under the umbrella of the Cabinet Office, has submitted three other scenarios to the subcommittee after deleting the scenario in question, clarifying that the secret meetings influenced the core of Japan's so-called nuclear fuel cycle policy.

The subcommittee of JAEC reviewing the nuclear cycle policy discussed the three scenarios and is set to submit them to the government's Energy and Environment Council.

Four members of a JAEC experts' panel on new nuclear energy policy have urged JAEC not to submit the scenarios to the government. "The proposals are unjustifiable because they were adopted in ignorance of a democratic process," read an opinion submitted to JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo.

The Cabinet Office's atomic power policy division, five of whose members attended the March 8 secret meeting, refused to comment on the revelations. "We can't answer any question that could actually be a bluff."

In the nuclear fuel cycle project, spent nuclear fuel would be reprocessed and reused as fuel for nuclear reactors. Reactors in which the fission of a chain reaction is sustained by fast neutrons in the process of reusing spent fuel are called fast reactors (FRs). Among these, reactors that produce more fuel than original fuel, such as the Monju prototype reactor in Fukui Prefecture, are called fast-breeder reactors (FBRs).

The Mainichi Shimbun has recently obtained a document detailing four scenarios on whether to go ahead with the nuclear fuel cycle project, including one that attendees of the secret meeting agreed to cover up.

Scenario 1 calls for the reprocessing of all spent nuclear fuel and its use in commercial FRs. Under scenario 2, part of spent nuclear fuel would be reprocessed and the remainder would be stored while research and development would be conducted to determine whether FRs can be put into commercial use.

Under scenario 3, part of the spent fuel would be reprocessed, the remainder would be disposed of and the project of putting FRs into commercial use would be discontinued. Scenario 4 calls for disposal of all spent nuclear fuel and the discontinuation of the project of putting FRs into practical use.

If scenarios 1 and 2 were adopted, the Monju-related research and development project would be continued, but scenarios 3 and 4 would mean that the project must be called off.

When the four scenarios were submitted to one of the secret meetings, held on March 8, for deliberations, attendees insisted that scenario 3 should be excluded.

“The subcommittee’s discussions would certainly focus on the middle (scenarios 2 or 3) rather than scenario 1 that calls for reprocessing of all spent fuel or scenario 4 that envisages the disposal of all spent fuel. If scenario 3 were included, there would certainly be some subcommittee members who would choose it,” one of them was quoted as telling the secret meeting.

“We’ve come to a crucial stage now. Scenario 2 is desirable and scenario 3 should be deleted,” another reportedly said.

A document detailing the four scenarios was also distributed at another secret meeting on March 22. At the time, the moderator of the meeting said, “There was a plan to recommend four scenarios but we reduced them to three.” However, attendees did not discuss the matter.

Mainichi Shimbun, June 19, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120619p2a00m0na015000c.html>

JAEC handed nuclear policy meeting docs to pro-nuclear figures at secret meeting

The Cabinet Office’s Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) delivered a list of issues to be discussed at a JAEC panel session on a new nuclear policy to pro-nuclear members during a secret meeting in February, it has been learned.

The discovery indicates that members in favor of atomic energy wielded their influence on the panel on Japan’s nuclear energy policy. Earlier it was found that pro-atomic energy officials, including those representing the electric power industry, had exercised influence on a JAEC subcommittee on the nation’s nuclear fuel cycle project.

The findings have proven that JAEC lied when it denied that pro-nuclear members who gathered at 23 secret meetings exercised any influence on the meeting on Japan’s new overall nuclear energy policy.

On May 25, the day after the Mainichi Shimbun reported that pro-nuclear members of JAEC held secret meetings, JAEC put up a statement on its website saying that secret meetings were held to draft materials for a subcommittee on the nuclear fuel cycle project.

JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo denied that the secret meetings had anything to do with the new nuclear policy panel he chairs. "The (secret) meetings were launched to facilitate work at the subcommittee. I proposed such sessions to subcommittee chairman Tatsujiro Suzuki," Kondo told a meeting of the panel to draft a new nuclear policy outline on May 29.

The list of issues on the agenda at the Feb. 28 meeting of the panel was titled, "Human resources and technological basis in nuclear power."

Copies of the draft were delivered to the attendees of a secret meeting on Feb. 16. Among the attendees were Suzuki; JAEC member Etsuko Akiba; Kyoji Yoshino, director of the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy's nuclear policy division; Masaaki Nishijo, director of the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry's nuclear fuel cycle division; and dozens of people representing the electric power industry. They did not include people against nuclear energy.

The secret meeting focused on how to secure human resources in nuclear power as the number of students who want to major in atomic energy at universities has decreased since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

One of the attendees was quoted as saying, "Those against the use of nuclear power only demand the Fukushima plant be safety decommissioned. We should emphasize that we need specialized engineers for that."

The attendees added a document describing the type of engineers who entered the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant following the accident to the list of issues on the agenda to be discussed at the new nuclear policy panel meeting on Feb. 28.

At the policy meeting, many attendees, including an anti-nuclear panel member, expressed support for human resource development in the nuclear energy field.

"Something like a 'nuclear reactor decommissioning technology university' should be set up," anti-nuclear panel member Hisa Anan, secretary-general of the National Liaison Committee of Consumer Organizations, was quoted as telling the meeting.

Mainichi Shimbun, June 02, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120602p2a00m0na009000c.html>

JAEC had secret 'study meeting' of nuclear advocates to draft reprocessing policy report

The Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) invited only pro-nuclear people from government and power industry bodies to have a secret "study meeting" on April 24 to draft a report on the country's policy of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel, it has been learned.

At the study meeting, a draft report with a cover sheet which read “Handle with care” was handed out to about 30 participants. The “Overall Evaluation” in the draft report — the conclusion of the report — was then rewritten in such a way as to make it in favor of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel in accordance with the wishes of power companies before it was submitted to a JAEC subcommittee. While the government has been emphasizing its plan to review the country’s nuclear policy from scratch, the revelation highlights the fact that the policy-making process has been distorted.

The JAEC subcommittee incorporated the amended version of the overall evaluation into its report and presented it to the “council of new national energy policy” chaired by JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo on May 23. The report is to be presented to the government’s Energy and Environment Council soon.

The Mainichi obtained 79 pages of A-4 size documents. “For use for 4/24 Study Meeting” is written on the upper right of the cover of the documents, with the title: “The Technical Subcommittee on Nuclear Power, Nuclear Fuel Cycle, etc. (the 13th round).” The documents were the draft version of the report that was scheduled to be discussed on April 27.

The secret study meeting was held for about two hours from shortly after 5 p.m. on April 24 at the Central Government Building No.4 in Tokyo’s Kasumigaseki district where JAEC is located. The participants in the meeting included JAEC Vice Chairman Tatsujiro Suzuki; Cabinet Office officials in charge of nuclear policy; Hideo Morimoto, director of the Nuclear Facilities Development and Nuclear Fuel Cycle Industry Division at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy; Hideki Oda, director of the nuclear energy division at the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan; Harukuni Tanaka, managing director at Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd.; a top official of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which operates the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor; and employees of power firms including Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Japan Atomic Power Co. Tatsujiro Suzuki was the only official representing JAEC.

The subcommittee discussed policies of reprocessing all spent nuclear fuel, direct disposal of spent nuclear fuel and a “concurrent” approach of reprocessing some spent fuel and directly disposing of other spent fuel. According to sources concerned, a top official of the Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. asked at the secret meeting for maintaining the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture. JAEC’s Suzuki, who chaired the meeting, was quoted as saying in his reply, “The concurrent approach is the best because it does not affect the project (at the reprocessing plant).” While it is difficult to secure consent on the idea of reprocessing all spent nuclear fuel because of the reprocessing plant being hit by a string of trouble in the past, they apparently feared that the direct disposal of all spent nuclear fuel could lead to the shutdown of the reprocessing plant.

Because the direct disposal of all spent nuclear fuel is more economically feasible even if the prices of uranium rise 30 fold, the overall evaluation in the original draft report said, “The direct disposal is superior to reprocessing or the concurrent approach in terms of total costs.” But while the amended draft report said “it was highly possible that direct disposal would be superior to reprocessing or the concurrent approach if the price of uranium remains at the current level,” it emphasized the merits of the concurrent approach in many parts of the report saying in part, “the concurrent approach is slightly superior economically to reprocessing all spent nuclear fuel.” The draft report was not discussed on April 27 due to a lack of time but it was discussed on May 8.

JAEC Chairman Kondo said, “It’s too much (if the draft report was distributed). That is an issue that involves my supervisory responsibility.” JAEC Vice Chairman Suzuki said, “I may have attended (the study meeting), but in the final analysis it did not affect the discussion at the subcommittee.”

Mainichi Shimbun, May 24, 2012

‘Secret meeting’ on fuel cycle was like gathering of ‘nuclear villagers’

A preposterous scene was recently played out behind closed doors in central Tokyo. A secret meeting on Japan’s policy for its nuclear fuel cycle, dubbed a “study meeting,” was held in the Kasumigaseki district on April 24. Government officials and businessmen from the power industry, who are supposed to draw a sharp line between the two sides, enjoyed chatting and laughing with one another. It was something like a gathering of “nuclear villagers.”

A mysterious document was distributed to each participant. The Mainichi’s reporting team later found out that the document was in fact the original draft report that was to later be presented to the subcommittee of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC).

Shortly after 5 p.m. on April 24 — at conference room 743 on the seventh floor of the Central Government Building No. 4 — a reporter witnessed men in business suits filing into the conference room one after another through doors that were kept open. They were all pro-nuclear people from JAEC, the Cabinet Office, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., Tokyo Electric Power Co., etc. There was no one there who was opposed to or cautious about the use of nuclear power.

Holding a pile of documents under his arm, a man in a blue shirt entered the room and put the documents on a desk somewhat roughly. He divided the documents into two piles because if he put them in one stack, it could crumble. One of the piles was about 20 centimeters high and the other about 10 centimeters. It was later found out that the documents were the original draft report for the “Technical Subcommittee on Nuclear Power, Nuclear Fuel Cycle, etc.” The draft report was actually discussed at a subcommittee meeting 14 days later.

Two officials from the Cabinet Office distributed one set of the documents to each participant sitting at desks arranged in a square shape. Sitting near the doors, a top official of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), which operates the prototype fast-breeder reactor Monju, was poring over the documents. Soon afterwards, the participants started chatting with one another. When one of the members criticized Tetsunari Iida, a staunch opponent of nuclear power and head of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies (ISEP), by name, the participants burst into laughter.

At 5:10 p.m., the doors to the conference room were closed quietly and the secret meeting kicked off. According to sources concerned, a top official of Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which operates the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, asked other participants to accept the concurrent approach of “reprocessing and directly disposing of spent nuclear fuel,” which could help the firm survive. According to the sources, he stressed that “if the Rokkasho facility were to be abandoned and spent nuclear fuel were to be disposed of directly, problems would occur here and there.” If the reprocessing business at Rokkasho fell apart, it is said that about 2,919 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel will have to be hauled out of the storage facility in Rokkasho.

The subcommittee presented its report containing the “Overall Evaluation” full of expressions in favor of the concurrent approach to the “council of new national energy policy” on May 23. An

industry ministry official condemned the report, saying, "Even if spent nuclear fuel is reprocessed, waste must eventually be disposed of. At a time when the government and bureaucrats need to come together and toil to create permanent disposal facilities, they are pushing for a policy that will only delay the inevitable."

When the Mainichi reported in its morning edition on May 8 that an agenda item for the "council of new national energy policy" headed by JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo had been covered up because it stood in the way of reactivating idled nuclear reactors, Kondo said "there was no problem." But in light of what happened at the secret meeting, the same excuse will never be acceptable.

When a Cabinet Office official, acting as an official of the secretariat for the council, distributed the agenda item for the council entitled "(Nuclear power's) Coexistence with local communities" to the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, the Federation of Electric Power Companies and others concerned, he was told that, "Should they include Shiga Prefecture (which is cautious about reactivation of idled nuclear reactors)? If so the council meeting will be bogged down." Then, the agenda item was withdrawn.

While insisting that it was inappropriate to hand it out to power suppliers, Kondo said, "That was not an agenda item but a memo. If it was an agenda item, it should have been arranged in a Power Point format ... The secretariat sent it out through e-mail by mistake."

But the original draft report distributed at the secret meeting came in a Power Point format. Furthermore, it was distributed not by e-mail but it was handed out directly to people from the power industry at the meeting. When the cover-up issue was pointed out earlier this month, Goshi Hosono, the state minister in charge of nuclear accidents, stood behind Kondo. We will see how Hosono will respond to this latest scandal.

Mainichi Shimbun, May 24, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120524p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Atomic commission chief admits attendance at secret session on nuclear fuel cycle

Shunshuke Kondo, chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), attended a closed-door meeting on a review of the nation's nuclear fuel cycle policy on Dec. 8 last year, according to memos obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun.

The revelation comes after the JAEC was found to have held closed-door "study" sessions with only pro-nuclear members in attendance. The JAEC held such secret sessions over more than 20 occasions, and an official of the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry, which is in charge of research and development of fast-breeder reactors, also participated.

The commission, which is overseen by the Cabinet Office, did not produce minutes of those secret meetings, and after each session, Cabinet Office officials in charge of nuclear policy were tasked with retrieving the many materials that had been distributed.

Following the finding by the Mainichi, Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura told a news conference on May 25 that the JAEC held 23 closed-door meetings from last November to April this year and that Chairman Kondo attended the first four sessions.

According to memos written by participants in the Dec. 8 meeting that Chairman Kondo attended, the gathering was held from 4 to 6 p.m. in a conference room of the Cabinet Office. The JAEC held the meeting ahead of full-scale discussions from January by its subpanel on Japan's nuclear fuel cycle policy regarding how to dispose of spent nuclear fuel.

Besides Kondo, participants included JAEC Vice Chairman Tatsujiro Suzuki; Commissioner Etsuko Akiba; an assistant division chief of the science ministry; Hirobumi Kayama, director of the Office for International Nuclear Energy Cooperation at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy; Kimihide Namura, director of the Radioactive Waste Management Policy Office at the agency; Harukuni Tanaka, managing director at Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which operates an atomic fuel cycle facility in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture; and senior officials of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan — made up of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which manages the prototype fast-breeder reactor Monju, and other electric power firms.

All participants were proponents of nuclear power and there were no opponents or skeptics present at the meeting.

Interviews with people familiar with the meeting and a subsequent probe found that the JAEC held more than 20 secret meetings, including one on April 24 this year in which copies of a draft report on the assessment for options on how to dispose of spent nuclear fuel were distributed ahead of the subpanel's meeting and representatives of the electric power industry sought revisions in their favor.

Under an unwritten rule, distributed documents were collected after each session and minutes of those meetings were not prepared. Some participants scribbled memos on the content of the secret meetings and the names of participants and e-mailed them to selected parties.

The JAEC organization has a chairman and four other members, and the JAEC law stipulates that the commission can convene meetings attended by the chairman and two other members and exercise voting rights.

Kondo has said his commission has refrained from holding debate on nuclear policy among three or more commission members to ensure transparency, but acknowledged that he attended the Dec. 8 secret meeting with two other commission members. However, he maintains he did not do anything wrong because it was a study meeting to provide data and seek explanations from participants.

Mainichi Shimbun, May 25, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120525p2a00m0na020000c.html>

Mainichi uncovers more secret nuclear commission meetings

The Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) held secret "study" meetings on the nuclear fuel cycle project in 2004, internal documents obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun have shown.

The revelations come just days after the Mainichi news team discovered similar secret meetings held over 2011 and early 2012, with the latest on April 24. The government has invested vast sums in the badly delayed nuclear fuel cycle project, which foresees reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel into MOX fuel to be burned in special reactors.

The 2004 meetings, attended only by those in favor of the project, were held on 10 occasions up to April that year, while the JAEC was working out the current atomic power policy outline.

JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo is quoted in one of the documents as telling attendees at a January 2004 meeting that the panel would immediately stop such meetings if they came to light, demonstrating the commission's desire to cover up the secret discussions, which documents now show had been going on for some eight years.

Kondo denied that he had said the secret sessions would be stopped if they were exposed.

"We did hold study sessions, but we never distributed a list of issues on the agenda. Instead, we only studied examples of nuclear power policy overseas, and there's no problem with that. I never made such a remark (about halting the sessions), but I told attendees to be careful."

One of the documents is titled, "The second study session on nuclear energy." It shows the meeting was held at a government office building from 8 to 10 a.m. on Jan. 29, 2004.

Among 15 people listed as attendees are Chairman Kondo; Masaya Yasui, then director of the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy's nuclear policy division; Itaru Watanabe, then head of the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry's nuclear energy division; and senior officials of Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co. Panel members critical of the nuclear fuel cycle project were not present.

It was in this meeting that the document says Kondo told attendees that the meetings would be discontinued if they were revealed.

Another document is a record of the seventh such session held on March 11 of the same year.

During the meeting, attendees discussed whether fast-breeder reactors should be operated on a commercial basis.

A member representing the government asked if electric power companies would operate fast-breeder reactors. An attendee representing the industry expressed reluctance to do so, saying, "We can't do it unless it's profitable."

The government representative then countered by insisting that power suppliers should operate such nuclear reactors, according to the document.

The nuclear policy outline adopted by the Cabinet in 2005 states that the government will aim to introduce fast-breeder reactors on a commercial basis sometime around 2050.

The documents show that session attendees not only examined relevant data, but also that only pro-nuclear members discussed key parts of Japan's nuclear energy policy behind closed doors.

It earlier came to light that similar meetings were held to review the nuclear fuel cycle project as part of a new nuclear energy policy outline to be worked out as early as this coming summer.

A source at the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry familiar with the case lamented that

government and industry officials involved in nuclear energy had remained unchanged even after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

“When I heard that preparations for the new policy outline were being made secretly only by those in favor of nuclear energy, I thought the culture had not changed since the nuclear disaster,” he said.

Mainichi Shimbun, May 26, 2012

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120526p2a00m0na007000c.html>
