

Very serious earth shaking events in Japan have created a global situation that is still running its course and which has the potential to cause the rest of the world to pause and reconsider the suitability of the nuclear option as a safe and reliable way of delivering low carbon base-load electric power to industrialised countries.

This issue is currently high on the UK agenda as the existing fleet of nuclear power stations are nearing the end of their life. Nevertheless it demonstrates clearly the need for much better evaluation and management of risk and the importance of taking all relevant factors into account when governments are planning major infrastructure projects and especially nuclear power stations. Indeed, in view of the potential for global risk arising from the impact of nuclear disasters should not such projects be reviewed in future by experts from a wide range of relevant disciplines on an international rather than a national basis?

On the other hand, when the EU was presented with a topic clearly requiring EU-wide legislation, such as better regulation of pesticides used in agricultural production, the opportunity was taken under REACH to extend the remit way beyond its original purpose on the "precautionary principle". The resultant effect will be to drive small scale users of essential imported chemical substances out of business.

The risk of long term damage from measures of this type that fail to take account of the priorities of EU Member States that rely on industrial manufacturing would appear to be unacceptable. The potential benefits, if any, of such legislation to the EU economy and environment are difficult to assess. Is this just the result of a misunderstanding, misapplication and misuse of the assessment and management of risk?

This issue also reports on two discussion meetings that are important to the UK both economically, such as the National Measurement System, and also from the human health standpoint where physics and engineering have created a new paradigm of medical physics, applying the fruits of basic physics research to clinical problems in a way that combines applied science, translational research and highly developed problem-solving skills.

SET for Britain, the poster competition initiated by Dr Eric Wharton, once again brought early-stage researchers to Parliament to celebrate and demonstrate the vital importance now placed on recognising, encouraging and rewarding the next generation of outstanding scientists, technologists, engineers, mathematicians and medics from universities and research organisations based in the UK.

On a more personal note I am particularly pleased to see the article by Steve Nicholson, Project Director, Mersey Gateway, and to learn that this badly needed and vital new communication link will come to pass in the not too distant future – and it is a really exciting bit of British engineering that will be a landmark for years to come.



Andrew Miller MP
Chairman, Parliamentary
and Scientific
Committee

SCIENCE IN PARLIAMENT sip

The Journal of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee.

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