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Proportionate Regulatory Control for Nuclear Sites in the Final Stages of Decommissioning

In the UK, nuclear sites are regulated by the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) and the relevant environment agency[1]

In the early stages of decommissioning of a nuclear reactor, the spent fuel and higher activity wastes are removed and stored securely elsewhere, resulting in radiological hazards on the site falling by over 99%. In the final stages of decommissioning and clean-up, hazards and risks fall to the point that regulation under the nuclear site licensing regime and application of the nuclear third-party liability regime are no longer warranted.

The 2023 Energy Bill proposes to align procedures for ending nuclear third-party liability with international recommendations[2] and to amend processes to end or vary a nuclear licence. At the end of the licence, the Health and Safety Executive will take on responsibility for regulation of health and safety. Environmental regulation will continue for years or decades after the end of the nuclear licence.

[1] Environmental regulation is devolved to Parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The relevant environment agency is the Environment Agency in England, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in Scotland and Natural Resources Wales in Wales –there are no nuclear sites in Northern Ireland.

[2] OECD Nuclear Energy Agency Steering Group, 2014, “Decision And Recommendation Of The Steering Committee Concerning The Application Of The Paris Convention To Nuclear Installations In The Process Of Being Decommissioned

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