

## Submission to the House of Commons Science and Research Committee Study of SMRs

(Prepared by Gail Wylie for the Coalition for Responsible Energy Development -New Brunswick  
– June 13, 2022)

The Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick (CRED-NB) launched in May 2020. We've since grown to 10 coalition core member groups, supported by more than 10 other groups and 120 plus individuals whose names are all listed on our webpage: <https://crednb.ca/about/>.

This short brief is intended as a cautionary alert concerning nuclear power in general and specifically small modular (nuclear) reactors being studied by the MPs as a technology for Canada to meet its GHG emissions targets. The most urgent of these targets is the need to cut emissions in half by 2030, keeping in mind also, the need to reach 'net zero' emissions by 2050.

CRED-NB members have been monitoring the 'conversation' on how best to accomplish these emissions goals, by tracking a number of news media sources, reading in-depth energy modelling analyses, and attending webinars presented by various industry promoters and by specialized energy experts. A number of recurring, misleading themes are emerging. These represent very serious dangers to the decision-making choices by our federal and provincial governments, including limiting robust and healthy opposition debate.

The most serious tendency is that of ***looking backward to a mythic grandeur of Canada's technological past***, rather than forward to implementing available, cost effective, practical solutions, and their emerging enhancements, for our current and future planetary reality. The repeated refrain that, "Canada is a 'top tier' nuclear player, with an impeccable safety record and mature regulatory infrastructure", is one such claim, promoted by nuclear industry proponents who stand to gain in power and financial terms. It understandably appeals to the imagination of politicians faced with attracting voters and inspiring constituents, especially in challenging times.

On deeper inspection, however, it amounts to high-blown language which can only be properly assessed by inviting input from experts in various specialties. Experts in nuclear science with knowledge of the history of nuclear operations in Canada - from extraction of plutonium for use in the first nuclear bombs, to the present - could accurately describe: the level of expertise in past and present; the accidents and near accidents experienced; the legitimate concerns regarding the volume and nature of long-lived nuclear wastes; and the newly emerging risks as reactors age, are refurbished and go through decommissioning. Claims that CANDU reactors are a 'world class' model of cost-effective power production and safety, should be assessed against the fact that there has been no market for them within Canada for decades and very little outside of Canada, whereas even the initial sales abroad were often financed by Canadian loans or otherwise subsidized at a cost of millions to the Canadian public.

The claim of 'world class' regulatory standards also raises the question of why it has then taken decades of pressure from the international body, the IAEA, to begin developing a Canadian radioactive waste policy and a waste management strategy? A few paragraphs of general intent has existed in lieu of policy and no documented 'strategy' has been in place at all. Why, when the independence of regulatory oversight is so important, is Canada's Department of Natural Resources delegating to the industry-operated and funded NWMO, the development of a 'radioactive waste management strategy', including even the establishment of the waste categories as 'high', 'medium' and 'low' level, with corresponding levels of management costs?

The independence of the CNSC as regulator is very much in question. As an example, the Chair of the CNSC was appointed in 2018, directly from the Ontario Power Commission role of 'Director, Planning and Control for the Darlington New Nuclear Project', i.e., SMR development, and continues to promote the potential of SMRs in public forums. The Commission hearings do not provide for cross-examination by intervenors, regarding a licence-proponent's claims, or the CNSC staff opinions, as any legitimate tribunal procedure would. A more comprehensive critique of the CNSC by Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director and Counsel, Canadian Environmental Law Association, titled "Nuclear Power: Regulating the Nuclear Power Industry – the Need for Independence of the Regulator", is available in "Corporate Rules: The Real World of Business Regulation in Canada", published in April 2022. We recommend that you invite McClenaghan's testimony in this regard. Regulator independence is of particular moment as the findings on the Fukushima disaster indicate that a captured regulator, acting in the power operator's interest over the public interest, was a key factor in the disaster.

Equally ***backward-looking is the June 9<sup>th</sup> presentation to the Science and Research committee re electric power costs that will not apply in the next decade.*** A nuclear proponent presenting to your study cited kilowatt hour power costs in Ontario of: 7-9 cents (hydro), 9 cents(nuclear) and 15 cents (solar). In 2020 the Ontario Clean Air Alliance published costs of 15.7 (solar in 2016); 8.6 cents (wind in 2016); 16.3 cents (SMRs as projected by industry, with their caveat that cost overruns could drive this to 21.5cents); and 16.5 cents nuclear power (projected by OPG for 2025 to finance Darlington rebuild). Given that the cost of wind and solar-with storage, world-wide has been falling, solar and wind will likely be even more competitive than their 2016 costs by the projected nuclear cost year of 2025.

A similar danger of '***looking backwards***' was presented in an argument against decommissioning of one Ontario power plant, claiming that this would significantly drive-up emissions by replacement with a gas-powered plant. This assumption that replacement needs to look back to old fossil fuel technology, ignores the obvious solution of purchasing available, very low emission, hydro power from Quebec, at a contract cost of 5 cents per kWh reflected in the OCAA 2020 report.

One absurdly ***retro-moment*** in the June 9<sup>th</sup> hearing was the demand by one MP, that the presenter who raised concerns about the manner of subsidizing SMRs, indicate whether she thought that the past replacement of coal plants in Ontario by nuclear power had been

beneficial for reducing carbon emissions! Acknowledging that real benefit from nuclear power which was gained over the past 40+ year history, surely has no effect on a decision in 2022 to benefit future decades where renewables and related storage and smart grid technology are now available and cost competitive!

Lastly, several of the proposed ***‘new’ technologies*** being floated at the hearings are really ***backward looking ‘old technology’ solutions***. Many of the SMR designs fall into this category, including the molten salt (Moltex) and liquid sodium (ARC) reactors proposed for New Brunswick. The U.S. government experimented with four small liquid sodium reactors which were commissioned between 1950 and 1965, and decommissioned between 1964 and 1994. Molten salt reactors of a variety of designs have been researched since the 1950s, with the U.S. Oak Ridge National Laboratory taking the lead in research over the 1960s to 1980s. Why would Canadians pay millions more for the CNL international consortium to experiment again with one of these i.e., the Moltex molten salt design? Why not call experts on these past experimental models to explain the challenges and help evaluate the wisdom of funding new experiments. A little ‘due diligence’ could save a lot of time and money for the Canadian public.

Similarly, the discussion of hydrogen as a future electric power source, is an old one that revives every few decades as a potential ‘solution’, when government subsidies are offered (characterized by one energy writer as ‘the undead’). The proposed use of nuclear power to ‘crack’ natural gas to produce hydrogen, appeals as a siren song for the fossil fuel industry. Any delusion that hydrogen made in this way, or by nuclear-driven electrolysis, can be a cost effective ‘clean energy solution’, can be dealt with in a one-hour lecture from Paul Martin, co-founder of ‘Hydrogen Science Coalition’. This is a group of scientists with long careers in the hydrogen industry, who have felt compelled to debunk this misleading public narrative about hydrogen production and use as a power source. Some of their information is available on the website: <https://spitfireresearch.com/articles-and-media/>. Paul can be contacted at: [spitfireresearchinc@gmail.com](mailto:spitfireresearchinc@gmail.com).

Finally, the oft repeated cliché “There is no path to net zero without nuclear”, is false. This is a phrase that appears to have emerged from the nuclear lobby in five years of laying the ground work for reviving the flagging nuclear industry by promoting SMRs. It does not become magically ‘more true’ by repetition. Should you wish more understanding of where traditional and SMR forms of nuclear power, do- or do-not fit as current climate solutions, the following summary of 7 nuclear and energy expert articles, with URLs for the full articles, should be helpful in your deliberations.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Gail Wylie

CRED-NB representative of Council of Canadians Fredericton Chapter

# Countering Nuclear Industry Narrative: 100% Renewable is Reliable Power for Addressing Climate without Nuclear (Summary of Authoritative Sources)

Part 1: Nuclear is not a climate solution:

Part 2: 100% Renewables can provide reliable energy without nuclear:

Part 3: SMRs are not a solution for nuclear industry or for the climate:

## Part 1 -Nuclear is not a Climate Solution

***Nuclear is just not part of any feasible strategy that could counter climate change*** <https://www.nuclearconsult.com/blog/>

Communiqué – Statement – January 6, 2022 published by Nuclear Consulting Group, by:

- *Dr. Gregory Jaczko, former Chairman of U.S. Regulatory Commission*
- *Prof. Wolfgang Renneberg, former Head of reactor Safety, Radiation Protection and Nuclear Waste, Federal Environment Minister Germany*
- *Dr. Bernard Laponche, former Director General, French Agency for Energy Management, former Advisor to French Minister of Environment, Energy and Nuclear Safety*
- *Dr. Paul Dorfman, former Secretary of the UK Government Committee Examining Radiation Risk from Internal Emitters (CERRIE)*

These four experts issued the recent communiqué, citing the urgency of the climate crisis and need to cut GHG emissions to address it and concern that nuclear power is being promoted as a response, whereas it cannot meet that challenge. They state that “The reality is nuclear is neither clean, safe or smart; but a very complex technology with the potential to cause significant harm.”

They list ten insurmountable challenges: (summarized here in brief)

- \* too costly in absolute terms;
- \* more expensive than renewable energy;
- \* too Costly and risky for financial market investment – so dependent on very large public funding;
- \* unsustainable due to unresolved problem of radioactive waste;
- \* financially unsustainable as full risk is uninsurable;
- \* militarily hazardous – risking proliferation;
- \* inherently risky given cascading accidents from eight sources;
- \* subject to unresolved safety problems with newer unproven concepts; too unwieldy and complex for efficient industrial regimes to build or operate;
- \* unlikely to help mitigate climate by 2030’s given lengthy development/construction times.

## ***Every euro invested in nuclear power makes the climate crisis worse***

<https://www.dw.com/en/nuclear-climate-mycele-schneider-renewables-fukushima/a-56712368>

*Interview with Mycele Schneider, Lead Author 2021 World Nuclear Status Report (WNISR 2021 409 pages) by DW News August 29 2021 (Deutsche Welle – Germany’s international broadcaster)*

When questioned about the role of nuclear power in keeping the Global temperature increase down to 1.5 degrees Celcius, Schneider highlighted the urgency of reducing GHGs and the criterion of how much and how fast that can be done with every Euro spent.

### New Nuclear takes too long and diverts funds from faster decarbonizing options

“And if we’re talking about the construction of new power plants, then nuclear power is simply excluded. Not just because it is the most expensive form of electricity generation today, but above all, because it takes a long time to build reactors. In other words, every euro invested in new nuclear power plants makes the climate crisis worse because now this money cannot be used to invest in efficient climate protection options.”

### Existing Nuclear cannot compete on cost

Schneider explains that even for the power plants that exist, their use is limited because:

\* “...many of the measures needed for energy efficiency are now cheaper than the basic operating costs of nuclear power plants”, and

\* “... renewables today have become so cheap that in many cases they are below the basic operating costs of nuclear power plants.”

### Why new-builds or continuing unprofitable operation?

Schneider highlights drivers behind apparent uneconomic nuclear power plans. Factors range from military strategic interests based on the links to civil power in France, to the building of the Hinkley Point plant in the UK co-financed by China as part of their infrastructure investments for geopolitical rather than financial goals. As well, accounting and financial implications play a role in delaying decommissioning investments, for example, in France where “only a third (of the required funds) have been put aside.”

### High Level Radioactive Waste Costs

Schneider notes that “No one knows how much this really costs, because there is no functioning permanent storage facility.” He notes that the most advanced projects are in Finland and Sweden where the 1980’s storage facility design has encountered corrosion problems with the copper containers and viability is still unclear. Also, discussion of waste reprocessing is “even further away”.

## ***Nuclear Energy Will Not Be the Solution to Climate Change***

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2021-07-08/nuclear-energy-will-not-be-solution-climate-change>

*Article by Allison Macfarlane in Foreign Affairs magazine July 2021 Prior to appointment at UBC's School of Public Policy, Macfarlane was Professor of Science Policy and International Affairs, George Washington University. She has a PhD in geology from the MIT. From July 2012 until December 2014, she served as Chairperson of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission as the only person with a background in geology to serve on the Commission. From 2010 to 2012, Dr. Macfarlane served on the Blue-Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future, created by the Obama Administration to develop a national strategy for the nation's high-level nuclear waste.*

Acknowledging that “The world is almost out of time with respect to decarbonizing the energy sector.”, Macfarlane notes the private and government interest in innovative nuclear electricity,

She concludes, however, that “Given the long lead times to develop engineered, full-scale prototypes of new advanced designs and the time to build a manufacturing base and a customer base to make nuclear more economically competitive, it is unlikely that nuclear power will begin to significantly reduce our carbon energy footprint even in 20 years...”

Current and past experience. Macfarlane notes the many nuclear closures in the U.S. while nuclear struggles to remain viable. She describes the capital cost and delivery time challenges of various start-up small modular reactors and then highlights their major challenge -i.e., their requirement for new fuels, “ which must be licenced as well as produced, managed during use, and stored and disposed of when spent.” Many require higher enrichment than is done in the U.S. and also have higher proliferation risk. She outlines the current significant cost overruns and delays of nuclear mega projects currently under construction in the US, France and Finland

Listing the numerous economic, technical and logistical hurdles faced by nuclear power, she concludes that we need strong government support of existing, readily-deployable, non-carbon- emitting technologies to focus on saving the planet from climate change, rather than relying on a nuclear ‘silver-bullet’.

## **Nuclear Power cost comparison**

*International reporting by Lazard for 2020, on levelized costs of power from various sources.* In US dollars per Megawatt, costs range as follows:

Electricity Source	Range of levelized costs per MWh	
Wind	\$26	\$54
Utility Scale Solar	\$29	\$42
Geothermal	\$59	\$101
Large Scale Nuclear	\$129	\$198

## Part 2 - 100% Renewables can provide reliable energy without nuclear

***Busting 3 renewable energy and grid myths*** <https://e360.yale.edu/features/three-myths-about-renewable-energy-and-the-grid-debunked>

*Article in Yale Environment 360, co-authored by:*

*Amory Lovins, American writer, physicist and chairman/chief scientist of the Rocky Mountain Institute. A long time advocate of soft energy path – increase in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources and related social benefits. M. V. Ramana, Professor and Simons Chair in Disarmament, Global and Human Security at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs (SPPGA), UBC. He received his Ph.D. in Physics from Boston University and has held academic positions at the UofT, MIT, Yale and Princeton Universities, working on the future of nuclear energy in the context of climate change and nuclear disarmament.*

They address three myths that have mitigated against broad acceptance of renewable power in response to climate change.

**Myth 1** The first myth that they rebut is the idea that “A grid that increasingly relies on renewable energy in an unreliable grid”. Using 2020 SAIDI data representing average power outage duration’ experienced by customers, they have shown much lower outage rates for grids with increased renewable share of electricity, both in European and U.S. locations.

**Myth 2** The second myth – the idea that “Countries like Germany must continue to rely on fossil fuels to stabilize the grid and back up variable wind and solar power”. They show how between 2010 and 2020, Germany’s renewables and energy savings more than offset significant declines in fossil and nuclear power, allowing renewable energy at zero or modest cost, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**Myth 3.** The oft-repeated cliché is that solar and wind energy cannot be created “when the wind doesn’t blow or the sun doesn’t shine”, they cannot be the basis of a grid that has to provide power 24/7, 365 days per year. This too is shown to be a false argument for traditional power sources such as nuclear. While fossil fuel and hydro also have some vulnerabilities to fuel supply disruptions or low water levels, nuclear plants have the highest planned and unplanned shut downs especially in France.

Nuclear plants in Japan and the USA have experienced increasingly frequent interruptions by climate/weather conditions in the past decade. The best approaches, which can draw on cost effective renewables include: the use of the (smart) grids to back up non-functional plants, accurate weather forecasting to allow some renewables to back up others, resilience of local renewables, use of battery storage as it becomes cheaper, demand flexibility and diversity of sources – both geographically and technologically.

**Note:** Nuclear unplanned shutdowns are also part of Canadian experience. Point Lepreau station, NB has had reliability issues since its \$2.4-billion, four-and-a-half year refurbishment in 2012, requiring an additional \$500 million in capital improvements since. The latest shutdown was 40 days in peak demand season starting in January 2021, due to mechanical problems.

## ***U.S. can get to 100% clean energy with wind, water, solar and zero nuclear, Stanford Professor Says***

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/12/21/us-can-get-to-100percent-clean-energy-without-nuclear-power-stanford-professor-says.html>

*Article by Catherine Clifford, Climate and Environment reporter CNBC interview with Mark Jacobson, a professor of civil and [environmental engineering](#) at [Stanford University](#) and director of its Atmosphere/Energy Program.<sup>[1]</sup> Jacobson, who has developed technical and economic plans to convert the energy infrastructure for 50 states, 143 countries (including Canada) and dozens of cities to be powered with 100% wind, water, and sunlight and without nuclear!*

Jacobson sees a way for the U.S to meet its energy demands by 2050 with 100% wind, water and solar and has 'roadmapped' transition to a clean energy grid by 2035, with 80% by 2030.

Planning for grid stability is key given variability of both solar and wind.

Jacobson notes "But as it turns out, first of all, when you interconnect wind and solar over large areas, which is currently done, you smooth out the supply quite a bit."

"Similarly, wind and solar are complementary and hydro is the perfect back up, because you can turn it on and off instantaneously."

He also notes that electricity pricing can help shift demand to off-peak times.

Lastly, Jacobson's current roadmap now includes innovative use of four-hour batteries for grid stability whereas ultra-long duration batteries have yet to become commercialized.

### Responding to Nuclear Industry Competing Narrative

In the last section of the article, Jacobson describes the challenge of having to promote urgent implementation of existing renewable power technology in competition with well-funded promotion of nuclear innovation currently in long term development and not be available for urgent transition.

Countering the nuclear narrative which relies on the fear of blackouts requires showing how grid stability is accomplished. The energy mix for each state is designed using three types of models: -converting current demand to 2050 projected levels, a weather model that predicts wind and solar fields every 30 seconds, and thirdly model matching of the 2050 demand to the energy supply from wind, water and solar every thirty seconds.

## **Renewables vs. Nuclear: 256-0**

<https://www.pv-magazine.com/2021/09/28/renewables-vs-nuclear-256-0/>

Article in PV magazine September 28, 2021 by Emiliano Bellini, interviewing Mycle Schneider, French Nuclear Consultant, baseload expert and lead author of 2021 World Nuclear Industry Status Report (WNISR).

Schneider explains that “Nuclear power is irrelevant in today’s electricity capacity market,” and outlines the 4% decline in nuclear power generated while non-hydro renewable power grew by 14%. This is explained by several factors:

### Renewable Costs falling

“Globally the cost of renewables is now significantly below that of either nuclear power or gas.”

As an example of the cost shift, in the U.S. LCOE of Solar PV dropped from \$64/MWh in 2015 to \$37/MWh in 2020, while LCOE of nuclear increased from \$117/MWh to \$163/MWh.

The WNISR projects that “By 2050, solar PV costs are projected to be one fifth those from nuclear power, across the EU, China, India, and US.” Similarly, the IAEA projects “major ongoing cost declines for offshore wind and solar.

### Lengthy Time to build New Nuclear versus climate urgency

The report describes the length of time to build existing reactors, i.e., average time from start of construction to grid connection of 10 years.

Schneider particularly critiques proposals to design and build new ‘fourth generation’ reactors: “We simply don’t have the time to waste attention, intelligence, manpower and funding for fantasy technologies that might or might not work, more likely some time in the 2030s or 2040s, while affordable concepts from efficiency to renewables are readily available.” He cites the example of Bill Gates investment in small modular reactors starting in 2006 : “Fifteen years later, he has nothing to show – no licensed design anywhere, no site, no prototypes.” He also cites failure of designs in Russia and China.

Note: in a webinar held by UBC’s School of Public Policy in October 2021, Mycle Schneider reflected on the conceptual change taking place: “Solar and wind alone cover a lot of what was called ‘baseload’ in the past.” He clarified that “The baseload concept has flown out the window. Nuclear does not have that space, but is in direct competition.” He suggested that the best system is one with multiple sources and a shift in system design to make the best use of them all.

## Part 3: SMR's are not a solution for the nuclear industry or the climate

### ***Can small modular reactors help mitigate climate change?*** (Appendix 3 Pages X to X)

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2021.194160>

*Article published on line July 21 2021 and by Bulletin of Atomic Scientists 2021 Vol.77, co-authored by: Arjun Makhijani is president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER) and the author of Prosperous, Renewable Maryland: Roadmap for a Healthy, Economical and Equitable Energy Future. M. V. Ramana is the Simons Chair in Disarmament, Global and Human Security at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, UBC). Former member of the Bulletin's Science and Security Board and a member of the International Panel on Fissile Materials, the Canadian Pugwash Group, the International Nuclear Risk Assessment Group, and the team that produces the annual World Nuclear Industry Status Report.*

The authors apply nine different perspectives in examining the recent claims for proposed Small Modular Reactors (up to 300-345 MW electricity) in addressing climate change, as follows.

Typology – A number of start ups are proposing various new model which fall into two types: - Light water reactors which might be licensed with less complexity given similarity to existing technology, versus new designs using a range of new fuels, moderators and coolants.

Economics and Scale – The authors conclude that lacking economies of scale compared to large reactors, SMR competitiveness with other sources of power will be a challenge. Historical experience casts doubt on claims for efficiency gained through producing multiples of a model. Mass production would require a highly unlikely volume of demand.

Mass manufacturing - This would require resolution of problems experienced in the past, including light water models requiring replacement of large expensive steam generators.

The 'track record' for development of SMRS in the last decade has failed to meet projections, with the most advanced light water design – Nuscale- in spite of heavy public funding and originally projected for certification review by 2015 is now projected for deployment not until 2029-2030 and cost estimates, with no construction yet begun, have gone from \$4.8 Billion in 2018 to \$6.1 Billion in 2020. At this point some original utility customers are dropping out.

The 'track record' of proposed non-light water SMR technologies is reviewed from the history of their research and development and past failures noted. These include 'sodium cooled', high temperature gas-cooled and molten-salt reactors.

Other challenges are examined : regulation; proliferation risks; addition to the decades ongoing costs of spent fuel wastes- including new problems unique to the specific newer technologies wastes; and the business risks of large scale factory set up facing uncertain demand.

**Conclusion:** The authors conclude, in light of their technical and economic analysis, that: "There is no realistic prospect that small modular reactors can make a significant dent in the need to transition rapidly to a carbon-free electricity system. To invest in them is to throw good money after bad."