

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND UNDERSTANDING FOR NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS: THE INDONESIAN CASE

Ilhamy Elias

Indonesian Environmental Management and Information Center (PIPLI), Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Along with economic development, population growth and rapid development in the industrial sector, the demand for electricity in Indonesia increases by the year, especially in Java and Bali Island. Based on the belief that a nuclear power plant (NPP) is technically safe, reliable, clean and environmentally-oriented, and relatively economical, the results of the feasibility study for the first NPP in Indonesia, coordinated by the National Energy Coordination Board (BAKOREN), suggested that the option of nuclear power could be the right solution to fulfill the demand. The Indonesian government officially declared to start the introduction of NPP in Indonesia in August 1989 in a ceremony for the first operation of the Multi Purpose Reactor and the Installation of Fuel Element Production for Research Reactors. Since 1991 the New Japan Engineering Consultants Inc. (New-JEC Inc.) was contracted by the government as the main consultant in undertaking a comprehensive feasibility study in order to give strong justification to the NPP program being incorporated into the electricity system in Indonesia. The study was completed in 1996. For the first NPP, an intensive siting study was focused on Ujung Lemahabang, Muria Peninsula, Central Java, as a result of a preliminary site evaluation of 14 possible candidates on Java Island. In recognition of this NPP program, Indonesia issued a new Act on Nuclear Energy (Act No. 10 of 1997) dated April 10, 1997 to replace the Act No. 31 of 1964 in order to clarify the legal basis of nuclear energy control in Indonesia.

On the other hand, there were various opinions from the public concerning the NPP development program. It is commonly believed by ordinary people in Indonesia, as well as around the world, that nuclear reactor accidents could result in the same order of casualties among the public, and damage to the environment, as that of an atomic bomb. Even some highly educated people can make an emotional judgment about the impact of an NPP. During the public hearing conducted by the DPR (Indonesian Parliament) prior to issue of the new Act, there was evidence of the increase in the anti-nuclear movement. Due to this unfavorable situation, and approaching the General Election when the political temperature is usually hotter, the government declared the delay of the NPP program in 1997. PIPLI (Indonesian Environmental Management and Information Center) has the opinion that those anti-nuclear movements were caused by the poor public information about NPPs conducted by BATAN (National Atomic Energy Agency). It is easy to understand because, as a research and development body, BATAN has only limited budget, of less than US\$ 100,000 in 1997, for public information programs. BATAN also has very limited man-power capable of communicating directly with the public, and have not been successful in involving public figures, informal leaders, and some NGOs who have better direct access to the public and public opinion makers.

The continuation of the program of NPP development after the Parliament General Meeting in March 1998, followed by the formation of the New Presidential Cabinet, will provide the right momentum to increase the public information program. The NGOs like HILMNI (Indonesian Nuclear Society), PIPLI, and others should have the opportunity and

play an important role in participating in the public information program. Since the annual budget provided by the government is very limited, the NGOs have to cooperate with international societies who are involve very much with the introduction of NPPs in Indonesia.