

Two weeks to go: Hunterston B achieves licence milestone

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Office for Nuclear Regulation grant a site licence to Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS) - major milestone that will enable the site's decommissioning.

With exactly two weeks until Hunterston B becomes the UK's first Advanced Gas-cooled Reactor (AGR) site to transfer into UK Government ownership, a major milestone that will enable the nuclear power station's decommissioning has been achieved.

The North Ayrshire site is due to transfer to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), the body tasked with decommissioning the UK's former nuclear sites, on 1 April 2026. It is the first of seven, with the others following on a rolling basis over the next decade.

Today (Wednesday 18 March) during a signing ceremony, the independent regulator, the ONR, granted a site licence to Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS).

The licence, which will take effect at the point of site transfer, is a legal document that will see responsibility for the site move from EDF to NRS. It sets out the conditions under which the site can operate and is crucial for future decommissioning work to proceed.

Two hundred and forty-six staff will also transfer from EDF to NRS, bringing their existing expertise and ensuring the continuation of skilled, well-paid jobs at the site.

The change in ownership is expected to take place on time and on budget. It involves the transfer of thousands of files and records, more than 20 contracts and six site licences and permits from EDF to Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS), the NDA subsidiary that will carry out the decommissioning.

EDF's Decommissioning Director, Paul Morton, said:

This first-of-a-kind project is a massive undertaking involving not just the transfer of a huge number of documents and permits but also of 246 brilliant people and the knowledge and skills they hold.

Transfer is on track to be delivered on schedule. This has only been possible due to the strong relationship developed between EDF and NRS which has given the ONR the confidence to make this change to the site licence and enable continued decommissioning.

Andrew Munro, Managing Director (AGRs and Paired Sites), NRS, said:

I am hugely proud of the collaborative work by so many people and organisations to bring us to this point. It has been a massive effort by all involved. We now look forward to welcoming our new colleagues into the NRS family on 1 April and embarking on the exciting next phase of the site's lifetime - the journey of safe, secure and sustainable decommissioning. We are ready to support the site team using the decades of

decommissioning experience gained in the wider NRS business, including the paired Hunterston A site next door. And, of course, we look forward to the transfer of Hinkley Point B later this year.

NDA Group CEO, David Peattie, said:

This is a landmark moment, for the site and the NDA group, and a clear vote of confidence in our skills, capability and expertise as we expand our nationally important decommissioning mission.

It demonstrates the strength of collaboration, with the NDA group, EDF, Government, Nuclear Liabilities Fund and regulators working together to deliver the transfer successfully, setting out a strong blueprint for the remaining AGR stations.

Above all, this milestone delivers lasting benefits for our current and future workforce, and the community, securing jobs, supporting the local economy and creating an enduring positive legacy.

Mike Finnerty, Chief Nuclear Inspector and Chief Executive for the Office for Nuclear Regulation, said:

The strong collaborative work between our inspectors, EDF and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority has helped deliver this milestone safely and on schedule.

It is now vital that the decommissioning and dismantling of these facilities is progressed in a timely manner.

This marks an important and progressive step at Hunterston B and we look forward to working with new licence holder Nuclear Restoration Services to drive forward our commitments to reducing hazard and protecting workers and the public.

Energy Minister Michael Shanks said:

Today marks the start of a new chapter for Hunterston B, which powered Scotland with clean energy for decades.

This smooth transition is vital for the 246 workers who will continue on site.

The current conflict in the Middle East is yet another reminder that the only route to energy security is accelerating to clean power - which is why we are turbocharging new nuclear, greenlighting Sizewell C and launching new small modular reactors in Wales.

David Mitchell is a Safety Engineer, who will transfer from EDF to NRS in two weeks' time:

Having already dedicated 25 years to the site I always felt that I would stay for deconstruction. As we have approached transfer we have had several NRS visits

including some roadshows, speakers and site visits. We are the first site to go through this and, on the whole, there has been a great deal of support.

Decommissioning is a new experience for me. It has allowed me to pursue a new direction of travel in terms of career path. Learning new processes, working with new people and being able to have the opportunity to have a positive impact on our journey.

During its operating lifetime Hunterston B produced enough low carbon electricity to power every home in Scotland for more than 30 years and it was the first AGR site to defuel. Decommissioning is being carried out using funds from the Nuclear Liabilities Fund (NLF), a ring-fenced £20.7 billion fund set up in 1996 specifically to pay for the decommissioning of the current nuclear fleet.

Transfer will bring the number of nuclear sites being decommissioned by NRS in Scotland to four, employing around 2,500 people.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/two-weeks-to-go-hunterston-b-achieves-licence-milestone>