

# Food for Thought

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## **NUCLEAR ENERGY IN MALAYSIA: LET'S DIG DEEPER ON WHAT MALAYSIANS THINK ABOUT IT**

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 01, 2015 | Comments(0)

PRESS RELEASE-1st JULY 2015 (WEDNESDAY)

### **NUCLEAR ENERGY IN MALAYSIA: LET'S DIG DEEPER ON WHAT MALAYSIANS THINK ABOUT IT**

Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (AWER) has carried out National Energy Security Survey (NESS) to establish a baseline data on energy related issues. The sampling frame used for the survey is from the National Household Sampling Frame (NHSF) which is made up of Enumeration Blocks (EBs) created for the 2010 National Population and Housing Census. The sampling was developed by Department of Statistics Malaysia.

Respondents were asked if they have confidence in the ability of Malaysian agencies to regulate nuclear technology in preventing any untoward incidents. Surprisingly, **only 2.14% of Malaysians are confident with Malaysian agencies' ability to regulate the nuclear technology in preventing any untoward incidents.** Another 34.99% Malaysians opined that the agencies are not able to regulate. Remaining 62.87% Malaysians are not sure on the ability of Malaysian agencies to regulate nuclear technology. These data only shows the lack of confidence of Malaysians when it comes to the ability of Malaysian agencies to regulate nuclear technology to prevent any nuclear related incidents.

In our NESS study, we wanted also to understand further why there is a negative perception on nuclear. When we asked the respondents on their major concern related to nuclear power plant, 34.44% of Malaysians are concerned about the health impact to them and their family. This is followed by 16.22% of Malaysians who are concerned about the impact of radioactive waste to the environment while another 12.75% of

Malaysians are concerned about explosion or radioactive materials leakage. In total, **these three responses (health impact, radioactive waste impact to environment as well as nuclear explosion and leakage) indicate that 63.41% of Malaysians are concerned about nuclear power plant's safety.** Meanwhile, 34.29% of the Malaysians are not sure of what is their main concern related to nuclear power plant. However, we have also included "I am confident that nuclear power plant is safe" as part of the option and only 2.20% of Malaysians chose this option. **In reality, public's concern over the nuclear power plant safety is a major issue that must be addressed by the Federal Government immediately as only 2.20% of Malaysians are confident that the nuclear power plant is safe.** Table 1 shows Malaysians' major concern related to nuclear power plant.

**TABLE 1: Malaysians' Major Concern Related to Nuclear Power Plant**

<b>Major Concern</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Health impact to me and my family	34.44%
Impact of radioactive waste to the environment	16.22%
Worry that explosion or radioactive materials leakage will happen	12.75%
I'm not sure	34.29%
I am confident that nuclear power plant is safe	2.20%
Others	0.10%

**When the respondents were asked if the government should study in detail the nation's energy need (resources and demand) first before constructing a nuclear power plant, 66.61% of Malaysians opined that the government must study the nation's energy need in detail first.** Another 11.00% of Malaysians opined that in depth study is not needed while remaining 22.39% of Malaysians are not sure if this is a needed move. The response by 66.61% of Malaysians echoes AWER's stand that the government must develop a short term, midterm and long term energy mix policy as well as demand management strategies first before proceed to build a nuclear power plant.

**When the respondents were asked if government should disclose the proposed locations for the nuclear power plant first to enable effective feedback from public, 69.20% of Malaysians opined that the government must reveal these locations first.** This is another issue that has been raised by AWER. Effective public engagement can only be carried out if the proposed locations are revealed immediately. This will allow relevant stakeholders to provide focused, effective and constructive feedback.

Human capital plays an important role in ensuring smooth operation of nuclear power plant as many nuclear incidents are directly related to human errors. When the respondents were asked if they are confident that Malaysia have expert workforce to manage nuclear power plant, only 20.66% of Malaysians was confident that Malaysia has the expert workforce. Unfortunately, **79.34% of Malaysians are not confident that Malaysia has the expert workforce to manage nuclear power plant facility.** Table 2 shows the confidence of Malaysians that Malaysia has expert workforce to manage nuclear power plant.

***TABLE 2: Confidence of Malaysians that Malaysia has Expert Workforce to Manage Nuclear Power Plant***

<b>State</b>	<b>Have expertise</b>	<b>Do not have expertise</b>
Johor	22.70%	77.30%
Kuala Lumpur	18.09%	81.91%
Kedah	25.33%	74.67%
Kelantan	16.12%	83.88%
Labuan	20.39%	79.61%
Melaka	14.47%	85.53%
Negeri Sembilan	11.51%	88.49%
Pulau Pinang	11.18%	88.82%
Pahang	19.74%	80.26%
Perak	12.83%	87.17%
Perlis	29.93%	70.07%
Putrajaya	29.28%	70.72%
Sabah	23.68%	76.32%
Sarawak	29.61%	70.39%
Selangor	19.74%	80.26%
Terengganu	25.99%	74.01%
<b>National</b>	<b>20.66%</b>	<b>79.34%</b>

Disposal of radioactive waste materials is another important issue. When the respondents were asked if it is fair to dispose radioactive waste materials to other countries, only 26.69% of Malaysians opined that it is fair to dispose such materials to other countries. Remaining **73.31% of Malaysians opined that it is not fair to dispose radioactive waste materials to other countries**. In other word, while Malaysians do not want such an issue in their own backyard, in general Malaysians also opined that it is wrong to dispose such harmful materials to other countries.

Based on NESS data, it is evident that the Federal Government needs to address the core issues surrounding nuclear power plant construction immediately. These issues are energy mix policy and demand side management, location of nuclear power plant, nuclear power plant safety, decommissioning cost, human capital, spent fuel management and actual long term impact to electricity tariff.

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