

## Letter: Don't let worries over waste hold up nuclear power investment

From Professor Anton van der Merwe, Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, University of Oxford, Oxfordshire, UK



People walk along the beach on the Suffolk coast as the Sizewell B nuclear power station can be seen on the horizon, near Southwold, Britain on January 31 2019 © Russell Boyce/Reuters

YESTERDAY

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Your recent Big Read “The nuclear dilemma: where to put the waste” ([February 7](#)) provides a useful summary of the issues facing policymakers, but requires some context about the risks of nuclear waste.

The civilian nuclear energy industry collects and stores safely all its toxic waste. It does this so well that this waste has never done any harm. There are few other industries with such an outstanding safety record.

Once stored underground, nuclear waste is even safer. So safe that the Green party in Finland has recognised that it poses no risk, even under the very worst-case scenarios.

It is misleading to imply that nuclear waste remains highly toxic for tens of thousands of years. The most radioactive and therefore most dangerous components decay fastest, leaving much less radioactive components, which are less dangerous.

Furthermore, much nuclear waste is partially spent nuclear fuel. This can still be used in fast neutron reactors under development, after which it remains radioactive for only 200 years. This is unlike other forms of toxic waste, such as heavy metals, which remain toxic indefinitely.

Nuclear waste is not a technical but a political problem created by exaggerated perceptions of its risks. Trying to eliminate this already small risk by not exploiting nuclear power creates much greater risks, including energy poverty, air pollution and catastrophic climate change.

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