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A request to revise the law on final disposal methods and stipulate a law that ensures the final disposal site is decided with the consent of local mayors

On 22 May, 2015, the Cabinet decided to approve a revision of the Basic Policy based on the Final Disposal Act regarding the high-level radioactive waste from nuclear power plants.

The new act emphasized that “the government will play a proactive role” in selecting scientifically suitable sites for the waste disposal (based on scientific evidence) and request that the local municipalities to cooperate in the investigation.

In order to ensure that the selection of the final disposal site is conducted smoothly, it states “it is important to ensure that necessary information is shared with the residents concerned in a continuous and appropriate manner, and to reach a community-led consensus reflecting the residents' opinions on the decision of the waste disposal site.”

The current law (Final Disposal Law) on the designated radioactive waste final disposal stipulates that “when deciding the location of the investigation for a disposal site as provided in Article 2-3” the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry must listen to and respect the opinions of the governor and/or mayor that represents the municipality concerned, during the selection procedures. However, this law does not clearly state what responsive actions will be taken in case that opposing views are raised.

Meanwhile, on 8 December 2009 during the Cabinet lead by Yukio Hatoyama (Japanese Democratic Party leader at the time), the responsive pleading for the written enquiry was approved by the Cabinet. The pleading states that “the location of the investigation will not be selected against the opinions of the governor or mayor of the local government.”

In order to reach a “community-led consensus”, the trust of the government that is proactively trying to promote the disposal site is be crucial.

For this reason, we strongly believe that the act approved during the Hatoyama Cabinet stating that the site selection process will not be conducted without the agreement of either the governor or the mayor of the local government should be legalised. If legalised, this should be considered as the foundation of gaining the trust of local residents.

At the same time, the issues surrounding the final disposal site do not involve only the local municipality and the residents of the proposed site. A revision of law to sufficiently reflect the opinions of nearby local municipalities should also be considered.