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1. The new UK coalition government plans to abolish the almost-new Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC). A May 2010 government policy document "The Coalition: Our Programme for Government" says in section 4 on devolution to local communities:

- We will abolish the unelected Infrastructure Planning Commission and replace it with an efficient and democratically accountable system that provides a fast-track process for major infrastructure projects.

<http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk/>

2. The new government programme includes a section 10 on Energy and Climate Change, which promises an off-shore electricity grid for off-shore wind power, and "measures to promote a huge increase in energy from waste through anaerobic digestion".

3. More worryingly, the government programme includes, under environment:

- We will create a presumption in favour of sustainable development in the planning system.

It is not clear whether this means the IPC will be replaced by a presumption in favour of on-shore wind-farms and supporting electricity grid.

4. Regional Spatial Strategies will be rapidly abolished. They have been instruments of cascading government policy through regions onto local authorities.

5. The Stour Valley Underground (SVU) newsletter of June 2010 draws the boxing analogy of Round 1 ending after their written submissions to oppose National Grid's 400 kV line from Bramford to Twinstead. Next (Round 2) NG is expected to try to justify its exclusion of underground options in the consultation process, against a context of changing government policy, changing infrastructure planning system, and development of a European under-sea grid. SVU promoted the "UK Ring Main" idea of an undersea ring around Britain (news292 etc).

<http://www.stourvalleyunderground.org.uk/>

6. The Chairman of the IPC has made a statement in the June 2010 eNewsletter noting that the IPC will continue pending new legislation next year and its replacement by a Major Infrastructure Unit. The Chairman assures developers that in the meantime applications will not be delayed and the public that opportunities to have their say will not be diminished.

7. The BBC Reith Lectures this year are given by the President of the Royal Society Professor Martin Rees on “Scientific Horizons”. The Reith Lectures are the BBC at its best. Two of the four lectures have been given to date; the remaining two are due on the next two Mondays. The second lecture did discuss climate change, power networks and also population management, described as a taboo subject. While the coverage is as superficial as needed for a general audience, it gives a thoughtfully moderate and balanced overview. Search for Reith Lectures on www.bbc.co.uk.

8. The IET’s Biological Effects Policy Advisory Group (BEPAG) has produced its biennial report on low-level EMFs. The conclusion is unchanged from the 2008 report, after a review of new evidence. There are structural problems with BEPAG:

- It is a small group of selected people, some with obvious interests
- It has a very long serving chairman with a seemingly entrenched position
- It uses a literature review system which is directed rather than exploratory
- It works incrementally with an interest in defending previous positions

<http://www.theiet.org/factfiles/bioeffects/emf-position.cfm>

9. BEPAG harks back to the days when David Jefferies was President of the IEE (forerunner of IET) at the same time as being chairman of National Grid. He was infamously singled out by Prime Minister John Major as representing the “distasteful” face of privatisation executives taking greedy bonuses. These were also the days of the infamous Enron affair which damaged world finance. Such was the culture and background to the privatised power industry for which BEPAG has been so helpful.

10. Having noted the above problems with BEPAG, its conclusions are perhaps not as strong as the impression it can give to media and decision makers. Its Summary says “*the balance of scientific evidence to date does not indicate that harmful effects occur in humans due to low-level exposure to EMFs*”. They are entitled to that view: “*does not indicate*” – much depends on how “*indicate*” is defined, whether to mean *suggest* or *prove*. The WHO through its evaluations does not assess the balance of evidence in that way, rather it recognises the rational possibility of harm. Whether the “*balance*” is for or against harm is not very relevant, though it makes a good spin for BEPAG and IET. The point should be that the evidence gives genuine grounds for concern. By contrast, BEPAG uses the word “*reassuring*”, which speaks more of its motives.

11. Assertions such as “*No generally accepted experimental demonstration of any biological effect, harmful or otherwise, due to such fields has been established*” may perplex other scientists who are aware of many such experimental demonstrations at sub-ICNIRP levels, but again much depends on definitions of “*generally accepted*”, “*such fields*” and “*established*”, and of “*environmental levels*” in the previous sentence.

12. The section on SAGE at the end of BEPAG’s report says “*the UK does not have a policy of restrictions on the proximity of homes and powerlines, which was judged disproportionate*”. While that may be true, it gives a false impression that SAGE might have so judged it. Two alternative views were recognised in SAGE. Only one of these two views judged the policy disproportionate, because that view only recognised the (rare) risk of childhood leukaemia and excluded other associated outcomes like Alzheimer’s disease. SAGE noted that the wider consideration would lead to about a hundred-fold larger impact. That would make such policies proportionate.