

UDPATE1: Gov't poll shows about 50% want to end Japan's nuclear reliance

08/23/2012

A government opinion poll on Japan's future energy policy showed Wednesday that nearly 50 percent of respondents want to end Japan's atomic power generation by 2030, a far larger portion than those supporting more gradual reductions of nuclear reliance.

The outcome of the "deliberative polling" survey showed that the more participants were informed on energy issues, the greater their support for reducing Japan's nuclear reliance to zero by 2030.

It is the first time the government has conducted an opinion poll on the future role of nuclear power since last year's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster.

Keio University professor Yasunori Sone, who headed the committee organizing the survey, said at a press conference that a large portion of participants hoped the country would withdraw from nuclear power generation despite "knowing that they (would) have to confront a rise in (electricity) costs as a result of an increase in reliance on renewable energies, and a change in lifestyle."

To assess the numerous opinions it received through the survey and other methods, the government held its first meeting with the experts the same day as it plans to have the results reflected in a new energy policy that it has been working on.

But with some quarters of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan and the business circle opposed to the idea of abandoning nuclear power generation, it is still uncertain if the government will come up with an energy policy that clearly seeks the end of the nuclear power.

In addition to the deliberative polling, the government solicited opinions from the public via fax and the Internet, and held opinion sessions nationwide over the past month or so, asking for people's opinion on how reliant Japan should be on nuclear power by 2030.

The government-proposed options are zero percent, 15 percent and 20 to 25 percent of total power generation -- compared with 26 percent in 2010.

Of a total of 89,124 comments the government solicited between July 2 and Aug. 12, the government said it has so far created a tally of about 7,000 and found about 90 percent supportive of zero nuclear reliance.

National policy minister Motohisa Furukawa said at the opening of the meeting with the experts that the nation's energy policy used to be compiled through consultations with experts. But this was the first time for the government to work in a way that reflected public opinion in formulating an energy policy.

"We'd like to analyze the opinions we received fairly and neutrally, while ensuring transparency," he said.

The deliberative polling involved a two-day discussion event through Aug. 5 among some 290 randomly selected people, whose opinion was checked three times -- before, during and after the debate.

The poll showed that the portion of people who attach paramount importance to safety increased from 67 percent in the first survey to 76.5 percent in the third and final survey, higher than those who seriously regard energy security and cost issues, said the survey organizing committee.

Meanwhile, the percentage of people who supported the zero nuclear reliance option stood at 32.6 percent in the first survey. It increased to 41.1 percent in the second survey after participants were asked to study distributed materials, and rose again to 46.7 percent in the third and final survey.

The percentage of those who preferred the 15 percent option started off at 16.8 percent and ended at 15.4 percent, while those who supported the 20 to 25 percent option showed little change and ended at 13 percent.