

The government wants to lift the uranium ban in Sweden

In Sweden, there has been no uranium mine since the 1960s. All uranium used in nuclear power reactors is imported, and five years ago there was a change in the law that meant that it was no longer possible to grant permits for the extraction of uranium in Sweden.

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Text



Photo: Samuel Steén/TT

But now the current government wants to tear up the ban again. In a press release from the Ministry of Climate and Enterprise at the end of February, it emerged that an investigation will be carried out to analyze and submit the proposals needed to re-enable the extraction of uranium in Sweden. The assignment has just been reported internally, but not yet announced. What the timeline for a decision in the Riksdag looks like is unclear.

"If the EU is to become the first climate-neutral continent, access to sustainable metals and minerals must be ensured. We need to use the uranium we have, instead of sorting it out and considering it as waste due to the current ban on uranium mining," says Minister of Climate and Environment Romina Pourmokhtari in a press release.

More than a quarter of Europe's known resources of uranium are found in Sweden's bedrock. But despite the fact that there is plenty of uranium in Swedish bedrock, it has not been mined since the 1960s at the Ranstad plant in Västergötland, both for economic reasons and for environmental reasons.

The plans to remove the uranium ban have attracted mining companies here. One of the companies that has come furthest is Australian Aura Energy, which plans to extract vanadium and a number of other metals, but there are also hopes of mining uranium. According to the company's calculations, the uranium could contribute 14 percent of the income from the Oviken deposit, writes SVT.

The protests have not been long in coming. Residents in the area are worried about having to move, that nature will be negatively affected, not least because of pollution of Storsjön's water.

URANIUM MINING

Uranium is used as nuclear fuel in most of the world's nuclear reactors.

In total, there are around 1,050 tonnes of uranium at Swedish nuclear power plants.

Uranium is classified as a metallic element and is mined in a similar way to other metals. The ore is crushed and then chemical processes are used until a yellow-brown powder, yellowcake, is formed.

After that, the uranium is further purified and then the so-called enrichment begins. All uranium used in Sweden is enriched outside Sweden.

After enrichment, there follows another process to turn the enriched uranium into fuel. Something that is happening in Västerås at the company Westinghouse Electric.

The spent fuel from the nuclear power plants is temporarily stored in Oskarshamn while waiting for final storage. In the interim storage, it can lie for up to 30 years.

It is also possible to reuse spent nuclear fuel, but this does not happen in Sweden today.

Source: Swedish Radiation Safety Authority

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