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Baptiste Gasse, Jean-Michel Do, Hubert Grard, Cheikh Diop, Sébastien Verel. Coupling of the secondary loop and the cooling circuit in a PWR involved in load follow operations. PHYSOR 2022 - International Conference on Physics of Reactors 2022, May 2022, Pittsburgh (Etats-Unis), United States. pp.3304-3313. hal-03901398v1

HAL Id: hal-03901398

<https://hal.science/hal-03901398v1>

Submitted on 15 Dec 2022 (v1), last revised 9 Jan 2023 (v2)

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COUPLING OF THE SECONDARY LOOP AND THE COOLING CIRCUIT IN A PWR INVOLVED IN LOAD FOLLOW OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The penetration of intermittent low-carbon energies in the French electric mix challenges the need of enhancing the manageability of the French nuclear fleet. Most of the French nuclear reactors have been devised to do load-follow operations in order to ensure the supply and demand balance anytime. However, it has been shown that the less the share of electricity production from nuclear energy (which would be mainly compensated by the development of wind and solar energy), the more load-follow transients will be planned to manage summertime peak of electric over-production or conversely winter season peak of underproduction. A coupling between the secondary loop and the cooling circuit of a pressurized water reactor has been implemented in addition to a simulator oriented French 1300 MW reactor model. We present here our modeling of the steam turbines, the moisture separator, the water reheater and the condenser for a typical P'4 French nuclear reactor provided with an open-loop cooling circuit. As we study off-design load conditions, we simulate a load transient based on real electricity production profile done in the past few years. We compare the temperature of the water withdrawn from the cold source downstream of the plant measured on site and the one we calculate from our model.

KEYWORDS: PWR, secondary circuit, cooling circuit, thermodynamics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The performance of the nuclear fleet is strongly linked with its capability to follow the load demand daily. Thus it can be self-regulating operations when the network's frequency slightly deviates from the setpoint (50 Hz in France), or load follow operations making the reactor power decrease from baseload mode (100% of its nominal power, what we call hereafter 100%NP) to a limit of nearly 30%NP. These load follow maneuvers are limiting at the scale of a reactor core because it makes the xenon concentration change as well as the axial power distribution. These two phenomena affect for a few hours the stability of the core

preventing any quick back to baseload mode just after the decreasing power ramp. Also, climate change must be taken into account as it can alter nuclear reactors maneuverability. For instance, global warming make the temperature of nuclear reactor cold source higher, which leads to a loss of the plant efficiency [1]. In this paper, we present a coupling of the secondary circuit with the cooling circuit. The first converts the core thermal energy into rotational kinetic energy through steam turbines while the second is necessary to condense the vapor coming out of the low pressure turbine. We model an open cooling circuit, which means that the cold water withdrawn from the river or the sea to pass through the condenser's tubes is entirely restored to the environment. We will focus on the heat exchange occurring in the condenser warms up the cold source water between the upstream and the downstream of the NPP: this parameter is under supervision at all times to prevent that water heating exceeds the limits imposed by French environmental laws.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE MODELING FOR THE SECONDARY CIRCUIT

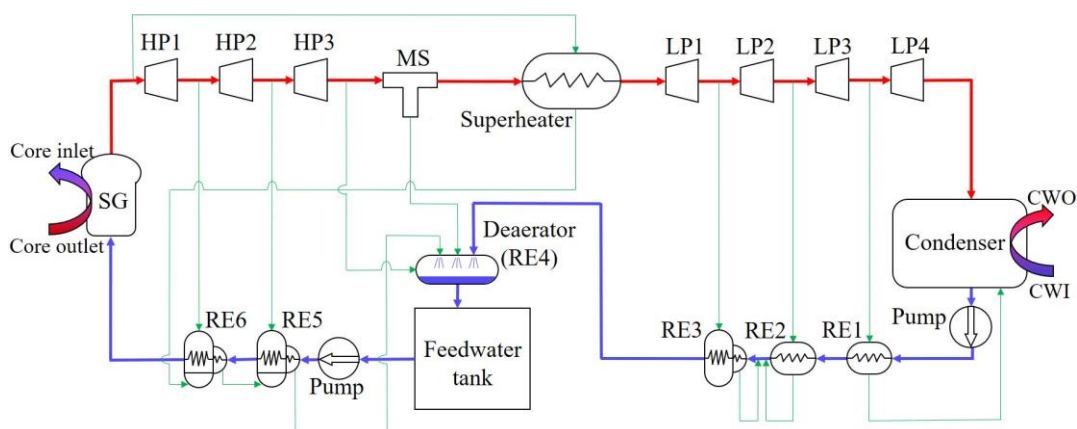


Figure 1. Schematic of the secondary circuit

Figure 1 introduce the global loop model for the coupling. It is compliant with the technology of French P'4 1300 MW nuclear reactors. The steam generator (SG) generates dry steam thanks to heat exchange with the primary fluid of the reactor. Then it passes through the turbines to deliver a great amount of its thermal power into kinetic energy. Let η be the efficiency of the power plant : $\eta\%$ of the thermal power extracted thanks to nuclear fission is converted effectively into raw power production, whereas $(1 - \eta)\%$ of the thermal power is released to the cold source to the level of the condenser (second principle of thermodynamics). Water reheaters are commonly used in power plants to improve the thermodynamic efficiency of the Rankine cycle, as it enables to heat the feedwater before it returns into the steam generator. This circuit is obviously simplified compared to reality, but it addresses enough complex connections between each component to simulate a consistent physical behavior to study baseload and load following modes of production. Similar schematic Rankine loop has already been used to carry out interesting results such as the optimization of mass flow regulation at turbine extraction stages [2] or the improvement of water reheater's efficiency and the turbines behavior for off-design load conditions [3-4].

2.1. The turbines

In our model, HP turbine and LP turbine only differ by the number of steam extraction stages. Hereafter we call *turbine stage* a group of bladings in between a steam inlet and outlet (thus HP turbine has three stages whereas LP turbine has four stages). We use the same model for both turbines. It consists in calculating the

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specific enthalpy at the outlet of a turbine stage for a given value of net electrical output of the plant. Firstly we find steam isentropic enthalpy at the outlet thanks to steam tables [5] and given steam properties of steam at the inlet (pressure and enthalpy). Secondly, we use (1) to find steam non-isentropic specific enthalpy at the outlet. Not only we assume that mechanical work produced by HP and BP turbine keeps the same proportion during baseload mode and off-design load dynamic conditions, but it is also the case for each HP and BP stages. The C_t and $C_{t,s}$ parameters represent the contribution of each turbine and stages respectively and were adapted from [6]. Its values are given in table I. We don't consider kinetic loss at the outlet of the LP turbine, which means that the whole produced mechanical power should be attributed to the enthalpy drop due to steam expansion. Also, we consider in our model 2 MW of mechanical loss, 60MW of electrical power used for the plant's own electrical circuits and an efficiency of mechanical to electrical power conversion of 99%.

$$h_i = \frac{C_t C_{t,s}}{\dot{m}_i} P_{mecha} + h_o^{is} \quad \text{with } P_{mecha} = \left(\frac{P_{elec} + 60MW}{0.99} + 2MW \right) \quad (1)$$

Table I. Contribution of each turbine stage for mechanical power. Adapted from [6].

	HP turbine			LP turbine			
P_{mecha} (MW)	496,9			907,5			
C_t	35,8%			64,2%			
	HP1	HP2	HP3	BP1	BP2	BP3	BP4
P_{mecha} (MW)	232,5	125,5	138,9	287,7	271	204,8	144
$C_{t,s}$	47%	25,3%	27,7%	31,7%	29,9%	22,5%	15,9%

We've calculated steam isentropic efficiency and steam non-isentropic enthalpy at the outlet. Finally, we need to get steam isentropic enthalpy in order to find steam pressure at the outlet of the turbine stage. To do so we consider equation (2) which defines isentropic efficiencies η_{is} of each turbine stage:

$$h_o^{is} = h_i - \frac{h_i - h_o}{\eta_{is}} \quad (2)$$

Furthermore, the more the load diminishes the more the loss of entropy through a stage during the steam expansion, which is a behavior frequently encountered in power plants [7-9]. We consider that the isentropic efficiency is reduced of 2% between baseload mode and half-load mode [8], and we choose a linear evolution from 100%NP to 30%NP given by these two reference points (table II). Values for the 100%NP reference point are taken from [10] for a French P'4 1300 MW NPP.

Table II. Reference values for the variation of efficiency of turbine stages. Adapted from [8, 9].

Turbine stages	HP1	HP2	HP3	LP1	LP2	LP3	LP4
η_{is} (100%NP)	86%	82%	79%	91%	90%	87%	89%
η_{is} (50%NP)	84.4%	80.5%	77.5%	89,3%	88,3%	85,4%	87,4%

Pressure at the outlet is calculated with the help of IAPWS-97 water tables [5] considering S_o^{is} and h_o^{is} . This pressure given for an ideal transformation is the same as for a non-isentropic one. Steam temperature at the outlet is deduced from pressure and h_o .

2.2. The moisture separator (MS)

Steam expansion in HP turbine affects steam humidity. During baseload mode, the steam quality is around 89% at the outlet of HP turbine, which is enough to damage the LP turbine pale because of the steam speed.

The moisture separator (MS) prevents this by separating liquid and vapor phases. We model the MS by combining a mass balance (3) and an energy balance (4) through the component. We neglect pressure and thermal loss during the transformation.

$$\dot{m}_i = \dot{m}_o^l + \dot{m}_o^v, \text{ with } \begin{cases} \dot{m}_o^l = (1 - x_i)\dot{m}_i \\ \dot{m}_o^v = x_i\dot{m}_i \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

$$\dot{m}_i h_i = \dot{m}_o^l h_o^l + \dot{m}_o^v h_o^v \quad (4)$$

2.3. The superheater

The steam superheater overheats the main circuit steam coming from the HP turbine (whose steam quality is 100% thanks to the MS). A fraction of the steam extracted from the SG is withdrawn to state as the *hot* fluid for the overheating process. It is assumed that the vapor withdrawal rate of the SG is equal to 9,5% of all the steam generated at all loads (there is no valve regulation for this withdrawal branch in between 30%NP and 100%NP [9]). In our model, we suppose that the heat transmitted to the *cold* steam (the one that will enter the LP turbine) is such that the *hot* fluid condenses totally (thus the superheater states as a condenser component). At the *hot* fluid outlet, the enthalpy of the liquid is equal to the saturated liquid enthalpy. Again, we neglect heat and pressure losses in this component at all loads so that the superheater is ideal (in 1984, heat losses have been estimated at about 9% of global heat exchanges on Saint-Laurent NPP [10]).

2.4. The feedwater reheaters

Heat exchanges in the feedwater reheaters are used to calculate the mass flow extracted from turbine stages by inversion. In our modeling, the steam flow withdrawn from a turbine stage enables to state the new steam flow rate at the inlet of the next stage. We use a dynamic curve based on real measurement made on a French P4 1300MW NPP [6] that shows the heating through the file of low pressure and high pressure water reheaters respectively (RE1, RE2, RE3, RE4 and RE5, RE6, cf. figure 1) between 30%NP and 100%NP. Having access to such measurement simplifies thermal calculation in each reheater cavity, which normally depends on the pressure and the level of water [3]. During a load transient, it frequently happens that both of these parameters shift, hence a modification of the heat transfer coefficient. We do not consider these variations in our study because a setpoint regulates the cavity pressure and the water level automatically. However, one must know heat exchanges that occur inside a solely reheater to calculate the steam mass flow extracted at each turbine stages. We choose to evaluate during baseload mode production the contribution of each reheater for the global heating. Namely, we use steam flow at turbine extraction branches given in [9] to evaluate heat transfer in each reheater. These contributions are indexed in table III and we assume they are independent with load conditions (which does not mean the same heat transfer occur at all loads).

Table III. HP and LP reheater contribution to the global water heating right after the condenser.

Reheater	RE1	RE2	RE3	RE4	RE5	RE6
Contribution	15,8%	21,7%	28%	34,5%	48,1%	51,9%

2.4.1. Single zone reheater (condensation)

The feedwater reheaters RE1 and RE2 are the simplest one to manage as we model them with a single condensation zone. Equation (5) is a classic energy balance gives the steam mass flow rate to match heat exchanges given at all load by the dynamic heat exchanges curves published in [6].

$$\dot{m}^h(h_i^h - h_{sat}^h) = \dot{m}^c(h_o^c - h_i^c). \quad (5)$$

2.4.2. Two-zone reheater in addition with additional bleed inlet

We model both RE5 and RE6 reheater with a *condensing zone* and a *drain cooling zone*. When the cold water gets into the reheater U-shaped tubes, it firstly heats up in the drain cooling zone (modelled as a liquid-liquid heat exchanger) then it gains the heat of the hot steam condensation in the condensation zone.

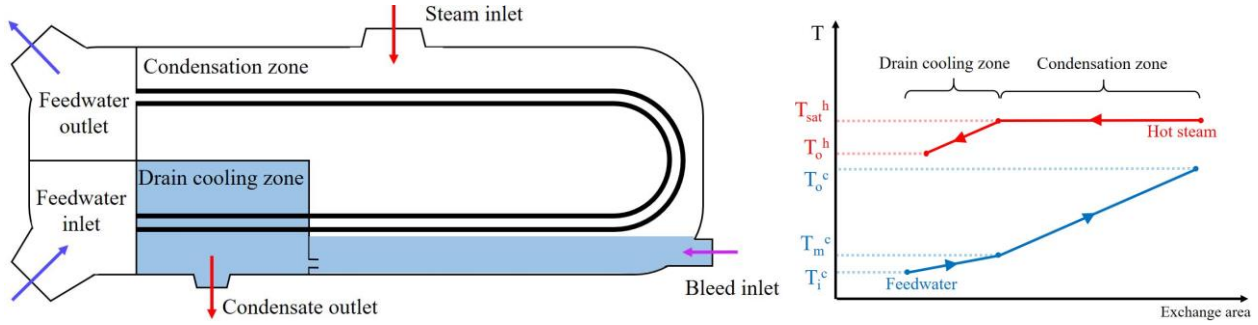


Figure 2. Schematic of our modelling of a two-zone reheater with additional bleed inlet (left) and a representation of its heat exchange diagram (right).

The drain consists in condensed *hot steam* (steam that came from the turbine extraction stage) as well as condensates from the superheater (for RE6) or from RE6 bleed outlet (for RE5). We introduce a schematic view of such a reheater in figure 2 (left). We model separately and successively the two zones as they call on different heat transfer coefficient (figure 2, right). We assume that for both RE5 and RE6 reheaters bleed inlets are always liquid whatever the reactor load. We use an energy balance (6) to describe heat exchanges in the condensation zone that involves a known final state (namely, pressure and temperature property of the fluid are known thanks to our dynamic curves [6]) and a fictive unknown state, the one that defines the feedwater after its passage through the drain cooling zone.

$$\dot{m}^h(h_i^h - h_{sat}^h) = \dot{m}^c(h_o^c - h_m^c) \quad (6)$$

Equation (6) shows two unknown variables : the steam mass flow of the hot fluid, \dot{m}^h , whose calculation is the main purpose of this model because it is also the steam mass flow rate of turbine extraction stage; and the enthalpy of the feedwater after it passed through the drain cooling zone. As the liquid-liquid heat exchanger is a fictive representation of a two-zone reheater, we cannot validate the fluid state afterwards the calculations thanks to industrial charts. Some authors use iterative calculations limited by physical industrial constraints [2] or use the Delaware method to estimate the heat transfert coefficient in each zone in order to get another equation involving \dot{m}^h and finally find it [3]. The first method was not adapted for our model since we want to implement the coupling into a pre-existing simulator oriented PWR model [11] and an iterative procedure is too long to proceed a simulation in a short amount of time. The second method assume that we have some datas on the reheater cavity and piping dimensions, which is not the case here. Therefore we choose to fix the contribution of the fictive drain cooling zone for the global feedwater heating with the help of baseload mode charts provided by [9]. This contribution is given in table IV bellow.

Table IV. Contribution of the drain cooling zone for global feedwater heating for each HP reheater.

High pressure reheater	RE6	RE5
Contribution of the drain cooling zone (θ parameter)	30,6%	17,8%

For instance if the feedwater gains 300 kJ/kg through RE6 it means that 91,8 kJ/kg (30,6% of the rise) owes the heat exchange in the drain cooling zone. Some research has demonstrated has found that the level contribution of the drain cooling zone (which physically stands for the liquid-liquid heat exchange area) varies with hot steam pressure and mass flow variations [12]. The study shows that there is an important shift of this contribution when hot steam pressure passes from 2,7 MPa to 3,8 MPa. Thus, hot steam heat exchanges with feedwater in the drain cooling zone progressively overtake the one through the condensation zone during such a transition. Conversely, the more the hot steam flow rates the less the contribution of the drain cooling zone. In our model, we consider that pressure variation effects cannot take over the importance of steam flow rates involved even when there is a load transient. Therefore, the contributions presented in table IV are constant with load variations in our study. Finally we calculate the hot steam needed to be extracted at turbine stages to respect the dynamic feedwater heating curve taken from industrial measurements thanks to equation (7). Then the enthalpy of the condensates needed for the next reheater are given by equation (8).

$$\dot{m}^h = \dot{m}^c \frac{(h_o^c - h_i^c)(1-\theta)}{h_i^h - h_{sat}^h} \quad (7)$$

$$h_o^h = \frac{\dot{m}^h h_{sat}^h + \dot{m}^b h_i^b - \dot{m}^c (h_o^c - h_i^c)\theta}{\dot{m}^h + \dot{m}^b} \quad (8)$$

2.4.3. Two-zone reheater with no drain cooling zone

We model RE3 feedwater reheater with both same heat exchange zones that the ones presented in previous section except that there is no additional bleed inlets arriving in the drain cooling zone. Heat exchanges through RE3 are modelled as introduced in figure 3 but equation (8) is slightly different (no *bleed* terms).

2.4.4. Single zone reheater with bleed inlets : the deaerator / RE4

The deaerator is a component that prevents non-condensable gases to reach the steam generator so that corrosive effects are limited on the long term [2, 6]. It is commonly assimilated as the final low-pressure heat exchanger that connects four main branches: the feedwater representing the *cold fluid* in heat exchangers philosophy, and *hot fluids* represented by HP turbine last extraction and RE5 and moisture separator respective condensates [2]. The modelling of the deaerator enables to calculate the steam flow rate extracted after HP turbine and just before the moisture separator. Again, we use an energy balance (9) but considering that the flow rate of feedwater is still unknown at this step of the model loop (*cf.* fig.1), the equation that gives \dot{m}^c is more complex but still calculable (10).

$$\dot{m}_{HP3}^{ext} h_{HP3}^{ext} + \dot{m}_{RE5} h_{RE5} + \dot{m}_{MS} h_{MS} + \dot{m}_{RE3} h_{RE3} = \dot{m}_{FWT} h_{FWT} \quad (9)$$

$$\dot{m}_{HP3}^{ext} = \frac{\dot{m}_{RE5}(h_{RE5} - h_{FWT}) + x_{HP3} \dot{m}_{HP3} (h_{RE3} - h_{MS}^{sat}) + \dot{m}_{HP3} (h_{MS}^{sat} - h_{FWT})}{h_{HP3}^{ext} + (1 - x_{HP3}) h_{MS}^{sat} + x_{HP3} h_{RE3}} \quad (10)$$

2.5. The condenser

The condenser carries away around two thirds of the reactor core thermal power at all loads. Therefore the efficiency of the whole reactor strongly depends on the efficiency of the condenser, namely its capacity to regulate correctly steam condensation. Heat exchanges that occur in the condenser of reactors having an open loop cooling circuit involve a water withdrawal from the river or seawater, so that weather conditions impacts the reactor performance. Moreover, in France, the temperature of such cold source tends to increase

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progressively, and low water levels (that directly affects the flow rate of the cold source) happen more often because of recurrent summer heat waves [13]. The hotter the cold source temperature, the less the efficiency of the NPP. Indeed, not only a rise in the temperature of the cold source make the condenser's cavity saturated pressure higher that deteriorates heat exchanges between the *cold water* and the steam coming from the BP turbine [14], it also affects the performance of the BP turbine [15]. Furthermore, the condenser's cavity saturated pressure also depends on the load. Industrial specifications of the condenser's vacuum pumps normally provides the curve network that gives the dependence with load, cold source temperature and flow rate through condenser's tubes of the saturated pressure at which heat exchanges occur. As we do not have access to these specifications, we've created a web of curves based on common datas published in the literature [14, 16]. The web aims at fixing saturated pressure of condenser's cavity with a given triplet of values : current load of the plant, cold source temperature and cold source volumic flow rate. It is presented on figure 4 (left). Furthermore, a variation of cold source temperature directly affects the thermal efficiency of the plant. We've calculated the variation of Carnot's efficiency with a changing cold source temperature. We've used the same variation (in percentage points per °C) for the real thermal efficiency of our Rankine cycle, which is adapted from [6] at baseload conditions. Results are presented on figure 4 (right).

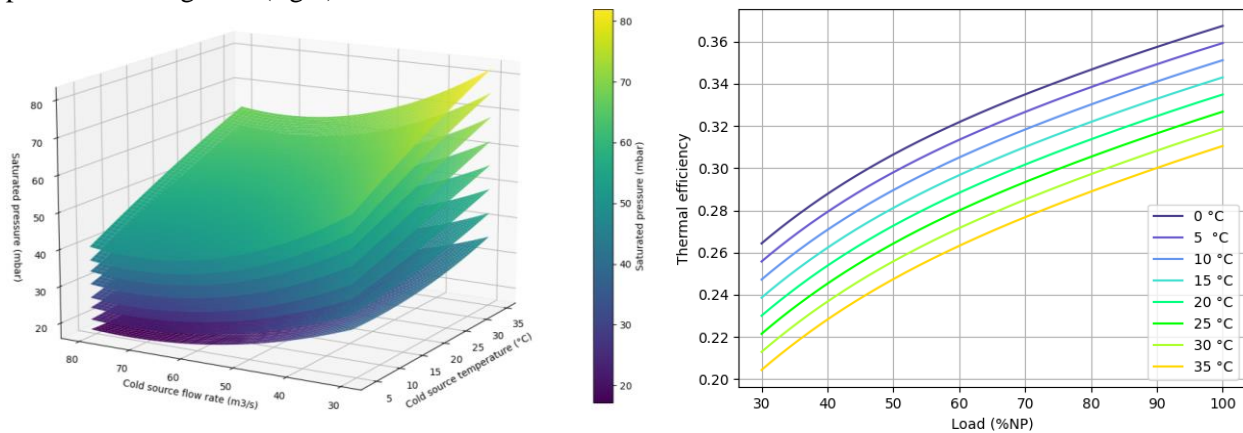


Figure 4. Left : saturated pressure curves in condenser's cavity (left). Each plan stands for an “iso-load” plan (100%PN at the top and 30%PN at the bottom). **Right :** network of curve giving the global loss of efficiency of the NPP due to a hotter cold source.

3. RESULTS

Our study aims at finding the cold source temperature heating through the condenser in modeling real load following operations done in 2019 and 2020. We use production profiles as an input in our model, which is flattened compared to the one given by RTE on its website [20]. Namely, we take the mean electricity production during periods only affected by frequency remote control ($\pm 10\%$ NP), and we model load drops that happen casually during a month. Figure shows an example of such a transient. The cold water flow rate that pass through the condenser is given by annual reports made by EDF [18] for each NPP under study. In this reports, EDF gives the cold source temperature upstream the NPP. Here we use datas provided from St-Alban (2 reactors, tech P4), Penly (2 reactors, tech P'4), Flamanville (2 reactors, tech P4) and Paluel (4 reactors, tech P4) NPP. One must note that all of these open-loop cooled NPP are built on the French North-West coast except St-Alban NPP which is cooled by the Rhône (a French river). Finally, we calculate cold water heating through the condenser simply by comparing it to EDF reports' datas at the discharge well downstream the reactor. For St-Alban NPP which is not cooled by the sea, we apply a temperature balance

between cold source water heated by the condenser and the main arm of the river. We use flow rates measured by the hydraulic station of Ternay [19]. The results of our simulations is given in figure 6.

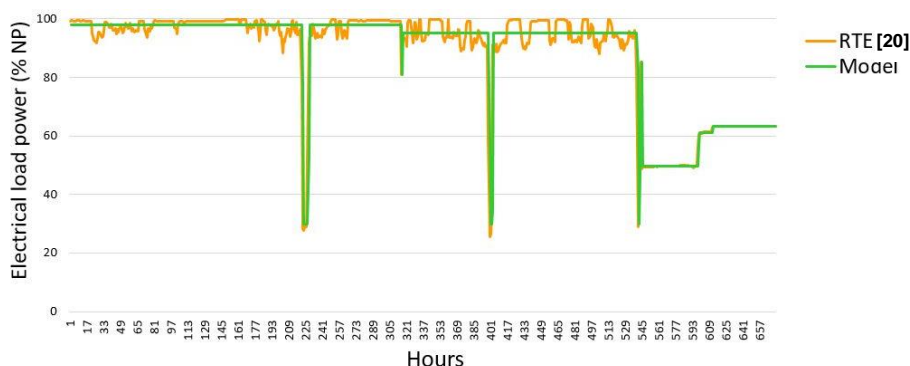


Figure 5. Production profile made by St-Alban P4 first reactor in February 2019 (orange), and our model used as input for the simulation (green).

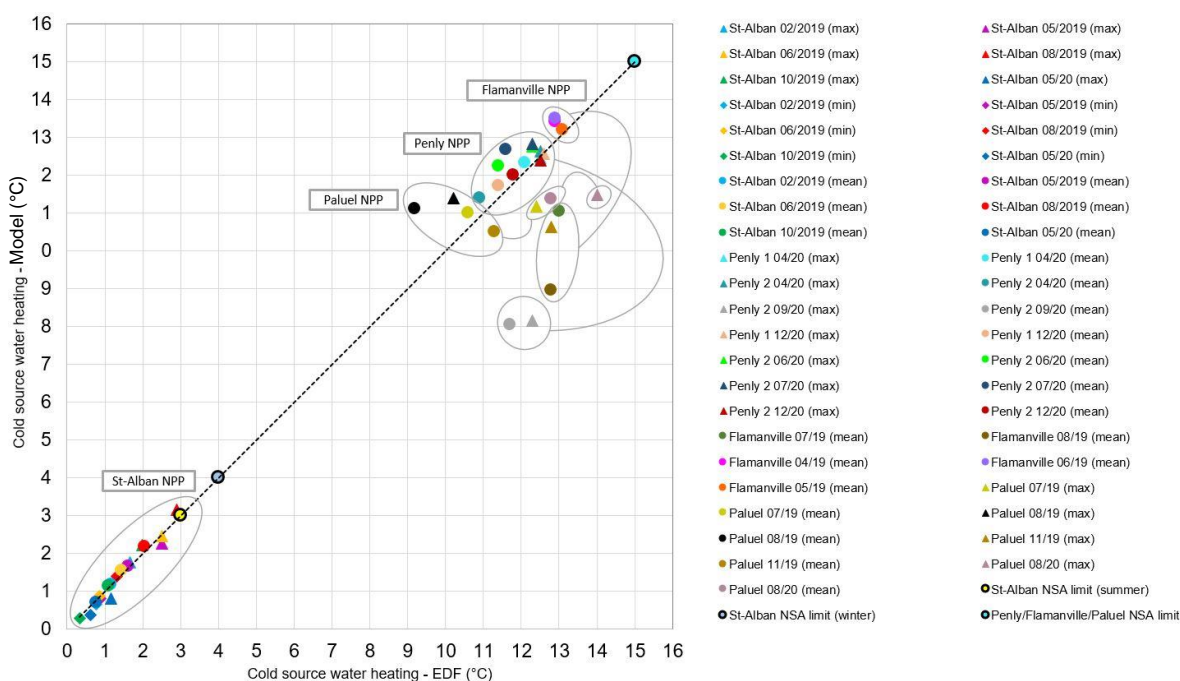


Figure 6. Cold source water heating corresponding to production profiles of St-Alban, Paluel, Flamanville and Penly NPPs. Comparison between EDF measurements [18] and the loadfollow simulator.

One should notice that not all months of year 2019 and 2020 have been simulated. Moreover, we fix the mass flow rate through the condenser's tube $Q_{\text{condenser}}$ by applying equation (11) that use of the monthly volume of water withdrawn from the river or seawater measured by EDF [18], noted V_m .

$$Q_{\text{condenser}} = \frac{V_m}{\text{seconds per month}} \cdot \frac{1}{\text{Nb of working unit(s) in site}} \quad (11)$$

Months when a load drop below 30% NP occurs can't be simulated as our simulator can't model the behaviour of the reactor core at these thermal power load. Furthermore, EDF reports of St-Alban,

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Flamanville and Paluel gives the total water volume withdrawn from cold source for all the reactors, which means that for these electricity production center we reject months when at least one of the reactor is turned on (or off) during the month, as we don't have access to a precise value of the second right hand term in (11). Results shows our model of the secondary loop is more adapted for St-Alban NPP than for other NPPs. Moreover, our secondary loop has been made by considering thermodynamic properties of industrial documents published in [9] that were taken from St-Alban NPP exploitation. In other words, our study shows an extent of an alike St-Alban's secondary loop to other nuclear plants. It seems that this model seems acceptable for Penly's NPP (despite two aberrant points for September 2020), but should be rejected for Paluel and Flamanville NPP, the later being the worse of all our comparisons. Indeed, Flamanville production profiles show that only two reactors were working during the months we chose to simulate, which introduced a great uncertainty over the calculation of (11) and therefore the value of water flow rate through the condenser. The fact that results obtained on St-Alban NPP show good consistency not only for the mean water heating over a month, but also for the minimal and maximal measured on the same period leads us to consider that our model for the secondary loop is as robust during baseload mode as during events of load following mode. Finally, figure 6 shows the Nuclear Safety Agency's water heating limits in force in France. Thus water heating after mixing with the main river branch must not exceed 4°C during winter season and 3°C during summer season (St-Alban NPP). These limits are less restrictive for NPPs at the seaside, as it must not exceed 15°C at all time. Besides, most of the bias noticed in this study may be assigned to unclear flow rates of the water feeding the condenser. One should know that in real operating conditions, CRF pumps used to extract water from the cold source were devised to get an upstream/downstream heating roughly equal to SNA limits [6]; these pumps have no variable rotational speed which depend on the temperature or the flow rate of the river.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We have devised a simplified non-linear model for the coupling of a French P'4 1300MW pressurized water reactor cooling circuit with its secondary loop, in addition to a pre-existent validated simulator itself coupling primary circuit with the secondary loop [12]. We have simulated real historical production profiles during a whole month that involves several load transient that our simulator can handle. The coupling we've modeled shows robustness and seems qualified to reproduce the behavior of load follow operations towards the cold source water heating. This work opens new perspective such as studying the enhancement of a fleet of reactor maneuverability during summer and winter periods where operators can meet temperature constraints with the cold source, which can affect the efficiency of the entire nuclear facility.

NOMENCLATURE

$\dot{m}_i (h_i)$: fluid mass flow rate (enthalpy) at the inlet.
$\dot{m}_o (\dot{m}_o^l, \dot{m}_o^v)$: fluid (liquid phase, vapor phase of the fluid) mass flow rate at the outlet.
$h_o (h_o^l, h_o^v)$: fluid (liquid phase, vapor phase of the fluid) enthalpy at the outlet.
$\dot{m}^h (\dot{m}^c)$: mass flow rate of hot fluid (cold fluid) in heat exchanger formalism.
$h_i^h (h_i^c)$: enthalpy of the hot fluid (cold fluid) at the inlet in heat exchanger formalism.
$h_o^h (h_o^c)$: enthalpy of the hot fluid (cold fluid) at the outlet in heat exchanger formalism.
h_{sat}^h	: saturated liquid enthalpy of the hot fluid in heat exchanger formalism.
θ	: contribution of the drain cooling zone for heat exchanges model of RE5 and RE6.
h_m^c	: enthalpy of the cold fluid at the outlet of the drain cooling zone (for RE5 and RE6 only).
$\dot{m}^b (h_i^b)$: bleed masse flow rate (enthalpy) at the inlet.
$\dot{m}_{HP3}^{ext} (h_{HP3}^{ext}, x_{HP3})$: mass flow rate (enthalpy, steam quality) of the steam extracted after HP3 stage.
$\dot{m}_{RE5} (h_{RE5})$: condensate mass flow rate (enthalpy) at the outlet of RE5.

$\dot{m}_{MS} (h_{MS}, h_{MS}^{sat})$: condensate mass flow rate (enthalpy, saturated liquid enthalpy) at the outlet of the MS.
 $\dot{m}_{RE3} (h_{RE3})$: feedwater mass flow rate (enthalpy) at the outlet of RE3.
 $\dot{m}_{FWT} (h_{FWT})$: feedwater mass flow rate (enthalpy) at the inlet of the feedwater tank (cf. figure 1).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank INREL for their financial support.

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