

# briefing

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Date: 20 October 2000

Subject: **Consultations and Dialogues involving NFLA staff**

NFLA Secretariat staff are increasingly being asked to engage in consultations and dialogues designed to identify publicly acceptable policies on a range of nuclear issues with implications for the health and safety of the public and the environment. This note provides a short briefing on current commitments, which are valuable, hopefully influential, but not always very visible, so that Members and Officers are aware of NFLA Secretariat staff work on behalf of member authorities.

## 1. BNFL Stakeholder Dialogue

This was initiated by BNFL over two years ago and involves all BNFL's 'stakeholders' including customers, regulators, staff unions, local councils, NFLAs and 'green groups'. For over two years NFLA staff and advisers have actively contributed to the identification of options for future Company development. The dialogue has been a means of information gathering and a platform to advance NFLA policy for an end to nuclear reprocessing. Progress is slow but produced an acceptance by BNFL last February that nuclear waste could be stored safely for the foreseeable future and that therefore there is no need to rush headlong into an irreversible decision on deep geological disposal of nuclear waste. A plenary meeting of all parties to the dialogue takes place in November after which a more detailed report on progress will be circulated.

## 2. Nirex

Dormant since losing its appeal in the Spring of 1997 against refusal of planning permission for what would have been the first stage of a deep underground nuclear waste repository, UK Nirex Ltd is beginning to twitch again in the run up to the publication of the DETR Green Paper on radioactive waste management. The Green Paper could be out by the end of this month.

Nirex made a presentation to the NFLA Steering Committee in July about how it saw its work developing in consultation with interested parties (ie. stakeholders). Nirex also joined NFLA delegates at the Oxford NFLA Annual Conference last month where an informal exchange of views took place. The NFLA Secretariat is now assisting Nirex with arrangements for a seminar at Manchester Town Hall in early December for a more structured discussion about decision making processes and confidence building measures which can help increase public ownership of policy over future radioactive waste management decision making.

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### 3. DETR

The NFLA Secretariat has been invited to be represented on a DETR Steering Group to advise on the management of a contract recently let which seeks to identify the information needs for the development of policy for long term radioactive waste management. This is in parallel with Nirex's initiatives and the DETR's consultative Green Paper to be published soon. The first Steering Group meeting has yet to be convened by DETR.

### 4. MoD

The NFLA Secretariat was represented at an MoD briefing last May on Ministry research and plans for future storage of decommissioned nuclear submarine reactor compartments. MoD's approach contrasts with the above initiatives being rather more rooted in the 1980s policy practice of 'decide, announce, defend' although it has invited comments on its proposals until the end of this year. On such an approach Nirex came to grief. For this reason the NFLA Steering Committee at its last meeting decided to propose to the MoD that it adopt a more inclusive approach to policy development (possibly along the lines of the current BNFL or Nirex dialogues).

### 5. Food Standards Agency

The NFLA Secretariat was represented at a structured two day seminar earlier in the month hosted by the Food Standards Agency to discuss policy and practice in the development of models to determine radioactive dose uptake through the food chain. A further meeting may be arranged to discuss outstanding issues. At the seminar the Environment Agency announced its own consultation on its methodology for determining dose uptake from manufactured radioactive sources. This will run until the end of November and Secretariat staff will draft a response.

### 6. European Commission

Earlier in the year the Secretariat was consulted on the priorities for the European Commission's 6th Framework Programme on nuclear research and development. DETR is co-ordinating the UK's response to the Commission in this matter. Reports have been prepared on responses received and a seminar to be convened by the HSE to discuss these reports is expected in November.

## 7. Contaminated Land

The Secretariat has been asked to participate in meetings organised under the auspices of the Environment Council to consider best practice for the treatment of radioactively contaminated land. Two meetings have been held and an approach has been made to involve the NFLA in further discussions. At issue is the definition of what constitutes contamination, the potential for regulatory control to be circumvented by dilution, and the need to involve local communities and representatives in decision-making.

## 8. Written Consultations

Additionally, since the beginning of the year NFLA Secretariat staff have responded to written consultations as follows:

- \* HSE consultation on Nuclear Reactor (Environmental Impact Assessment for Decommissioning) Regulations guidance (11 January);
- \* Environment Agency consultations on new radioactive waste authorisations for Harwell (19 January);
- \* Environment Agency consultation on "Scope and Methodology for the full re-examination of the Sellafield Authorisations for the disposal of radioactive waste"(17 April);
- \* DTI consultation on what is the best method to use to manage spent fuel on the Dounreay site (2 June);
- \* DETR consultation on the draft strategy to meet the UK's OSPAR commitments (22 September);
- \* Environment Agency consultations on new radioactive waste authorisations for Magnox Stations (30 September).

## 9. Other Advisory Work

Secretariat staff have also recently been invited to join the Royal Institute for International Affairs Advisory Body overseeing research on the future outlook for nuclear energy.

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