

Nuclear Free Local Authorities

briefing



Date: 15 May 2001

Subject: **Summary of main points from the NFLA Steering Committee Meeting, Manchester Town Hall, 29 March 2001**

1. **BNFL update**

The Steering Committee received reports regarding:

1.1 **Storage of Highly Active Wastes**

The NFLA Secretary had again written to the Environment and Energy Ministers at length regarding the Committee's continuing concerns about the safety of storage of highly radioactive liquid wastes at Sellafield. This correspondence was copied to the Environment Ministers of OSPAR member states and to BNFL customers whose waste reprocessing at Sellafield creates these volatile liquids. Letters of support had been received from Iceland and Ireland.

1.2 **Sellafield MOX Plant**

The Legal Adviser informed the meeting of a new fourth round of public consultation on the justification for operating the Sellafield MOX Plant. BNFL first applied to the Environment Agency for an authorisation that would allow it to open SMP in November 1996. Since then there have been three other rounds of public consultations in an effort to determine justification for operation. It was decided:

That the NFLA Secretary and Legal Adviser circulate briefing materials to Member authorities as soon as possible to guide their response to the DETR consultation and that a response on behalf of the Committee be submitted before the consultation deadline on 23 May 2001.

1.3 **Technetium-99 Abatement Consultation**

The NFLA Secretariat had issued a briefing to member authorities, prepared by the Legal Adviser, to assist responses to the Environment Agency consultation. The Legal Adviser had also submitted a response to the Environment Agency on behalf of the Steering Committee and this was copied to OSPAR Environment Ministers and other interested parties. Copies of submissions from governments concerned about radioactive pollution of the marine environment have been received in return.

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1.4 Other relevant information

Members were informed that:

- the *British Nuclear Industry Forum* - the trade association for UK nuclear companies and contractors - had called for an end to nuclear reprocessing at Sellafield;
- the Chairman of *British Energy* had said it costs his company seven times more for spent fuel management in the UK than is paid by nuclear operators in the US; and
- estimated decommissioning costs at Sellafield had risen from £28 billion to £34 billion.

2. Radioactive Waste Management Policy

2.1 Government Consultative Paper

The Committee was informed that the Government was delaying consultation on future policy for long-term radioactive waste management until after a General Election.

2.2 EU COWAM (COmmunities & nuclear WAste Management) Concerted Action

The EC is funding a COWAM workshop in Oskarshamn (Sweden's centre for radioactive waste management) between 18-21 September 2001. Details are available from the NFLA Secretariat. The Steering Committee decided:

That the Committee be represented in the COWAM process by the Legal Adviser and expenditure for this purpose not exceeding £500 be approved should COWAM funding be unavailable.

3. Control of Radioactive Scrap Metals

A *Radioactive Scrap Metals* briefing was released under a covering NFLA press notice in advance of the Steering Committee meeting. *Steel Action* had agreed to undertake its own promotional work in this matter. The Secretary was investigating further publicity through national media. The briefing had been circulated to: all NFLA officer and member contacts (contact the Secretariat for additional copies); regulatory agencies and advisory bodies; the scrap metal trade association; low level radiation campaigners; and members of environment and industry committees in the Westminster and Edinburgh Parliaments and Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies.

The NFLA Legal Adviser had asked convenors of the BNFL 'stakeholder dialogue' on decommissioning nuclear sites to circulate the booklet to organisational representatives engaged in the dialogue. Similarly, the NFLA Secretary had asked members of the MoD steering group on storage policy for decommissioned nuclear submarines to consider the booklet's findings.

A formal request for consideration of report recommendations would go to relevant Ministers and the Secretariat planned to liaise with report sponsors - *Steel Action* and *the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation* - about this.

The Committee was also informed that:

- HSE reported an incident where a radioactive source escaped from Hunterston Nuclear Power Station in a consignment of scrap metal last August (subsequent press investigation revealed three further incidents); and
- the Environment Agency reported a scrap metal incident at a Company in Barry, South Wales last January.
- [A further incident was detected at a freight terminal at Coatbridge, North Lanarkshire, at the end of April.]

4. **US Ballistic Missile Defence: Local Authority Issues**

The Secretary introduced a report to update Members on developments in Ballistic Missile Defences and to consider the implications for local authorities. The report recapped the antecedents to current ballistic nuclear missile defence proposals and highlighted this to be only one aspect of a much more ambitious US space militarisation programme. International implications were considered and the roles of the radar and missile tracking stations at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill in Yorkshire were outlined. Resolutions expressing concern about BMD carried by Leeds and Rotherham Councils were reported and the Committee was informed that the Mayor of London had placed his concerns on record too. Details of a forthcoming International Conference in Leeds on BMD were provided. It was decided:

4.1 That the NFLA Secretary prepare a BMD briefing for NFLA members together with model resolution text for use locally.

4.2 That the Steering Committee be represented by Cllr Hemingway and the Secretary at the Leeds international BMD conference.

4.3 That the Committee receive further reports as appropriate regarding this matter.

5. **5th World Conference of Mayors for Peace**

The Committee received a report about the *5th World Conference of Mayors for Peace* and the invitation to attend received by the NFLA Chair.

Considering the links already established between NFLAs and *Mayors for Peace*; the relevance of the *Mayors for Peace* programme; ; the opportunity for the NFLA Chair to address the conference; and plans by the President of *Mayors for Peace*, Hiroshima Mayor Dr Tadatoshi Akiba to visit the UK in the Autumn of 2001, it was decided:

That expenditure up to £1,500 be agreed to enable the Chair to attend and address the 5th World Conference of Mayors for Peace

6. **NFLA Annual Conference 2001: Draft Programme**

The Secretary tabled a draft programme which opened with an address by the Mayor of Hiroshima and followed with speakers covering a number of plutonium and proliferation management issues. A first conference announcement would be issued as soon as possible.

7. **Arms Conversion Project**

Current funding for the ACP has expired and this necessitates a suspension of Project activities until further notice. The ACP Steering Group was anxious not to lose the accumulated Project expertise and asked the NFLA Steering Committee for its support. It was decided:

That the NFLA Secretary, in consultation with the NFLA Chair, ACP Chair and Vice Chair, write (undercover of ACP letterhead) to all council Leaders and Heads of economic development departments to: a) set out the past achievements of the ACP and b) seek views on terms of reference, options for future project funding and levels of potential activity.

8. **Progress Report**

Members were updated on a number of matters as follows: developments at Dounreay; a challenge to the legality of site radioactive discharge authorisations at AWE Aldermaston; implementation of the *Radiation Emergency & Public Information Regulations*; an NFLA commissioned response to the Environment Agency consultation: *Discharges of Radioactive Waste to the Environment - Principles for the Assessment of Public Doses*; an NFLA response by the Legal Adviser to the DETR Consultation: *Statutory Guidance on the Regulation of Radioactive Discharges in the Environment from Nuclear Licensed Sites*; an NFLA response in writing and in person by the Legal Adviser to the *Greater London Authority* inquiry into the transportation of nuclear materials by rail through the Capital; an NFLA and NGOs meeting last February with the Environment Agency about radioactive issues; developments regarding depleted uranium (*the NFLA Secretary was asked to report more fully to the next Steering Committee meeting*); an NFLA submission to a US *Nuclear Regulatory Commission* consultation on recycling radioactively contaminated soil; NFLA involvement in a stakeholder dialogue on the remediation of radioactively contaminated land; proposed NFLA involvement in a stakeholder dialogue on policy towards nuclear site decommissioning (*the Committee decided that it should be represented in the dialogue by the NFLA Legal Adviser*); and attendance by the NFLA Secretary at a Royal Institute for International Affairs Seminar on nuclear energy & climate change.

10. **Date of next meeting**

Manchester Town Hall, 11am, Friday 29 June 2001

For more information on the above matters contact: **Stewart Kemp** 0161 234 3244