



Date: 23 August 2004

No. 39

Subject: **Summary of the main points from the NFLA Steering Committee Meeting, Town Hall, Manchester, 9 July 2004**

## 1. **Solid Radioactive Waste Management Policy**

The Steering Committee received a progress report on the Government's Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM); developments with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority; progress with the MoD's public consultation on proposals for the interim management of decommissioned nuclear submarines (ISOLUS); progress with the BNFL Stakeholder Dialogue; developments at Dounreay, Sellafield and within the European Union; and further correspondence about the Nirex shortlist of sites previously considered suitable for deep disposal of radioactive wastes.

ISOLUS: The Committee was advised that the number of identified sites considered for storage of decommissioned nuclear submarine radioactive wastes had reduced from 7 to 5. MoD accepted the view of the ISOLUS consultation steering group (that includes NFLA representation) that further consultation would be required if any new sites were identified. MoD continued to reject the NFLA call to publish the list of 118 coastal locations in MoD ownership, that were being reviewed to determine potential suitability for intact reactor compartment storage. MoD said that this was not relevant to ISOLUS progress. A number of individual authorities had also urged MoD to publish this list. (Later in July MoD announced the outcome of its review saying only the nuclear weapons storage depot at Coulport on the Clyde could be suitable for interim land storage of reactor compartments. At the time of writing no announcement has been made about further consultation on the Coulport site.)

Nirex shortlist: The Steering Committee continues to press for publication of the list of twelve sites considered suitable for radioactive waste disposal before the collapse of Nirex's investigations in 1997. The Committee has argued that sites suitable for geological disposal before 1997 will continue to be suitable after 1997 and communities at these locations had a right to know, particularly as the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management was considering geological disposal as one option to recommend to Government for 'higher level' radioactive waste containment. The Legal Adviser explained that he had written on behalf of the Committee to Nirex and government departments many times asking for a copy of this list. Nirex had consulted a QC twice over whether or not they could disclose this list to NFLAs. The Legal Adviser would write again urging publication though he explained that the situation could change in January 2005 when the new Freedom of Information Act comes into force.

Dounreay: Shetland Islands Council reported its concern about the possibility of Dounreay being used as a site to host radioactive waste from overseas as well as the UK. The Council had complained bitterly to the UKAEA about proposals to construct an incinerator to burn radioactively contaminated oils and solvents, despite Shetland's strong opposition. The Council was further incensed because its detailed concerns, supported by NFLAs, had been ignored in the UKAEA's published analysis of consultation responses. (However, following the meeting Shetland Islands Council received an apology from UKAEA and an undertaking that the consultation analysis would be rewritten).



2. **Local Government Association Special Interest Group on Radioactive Waste Management & Nuclear Decommissioning**

The meeting was informed that the LGA SIG continued to develop and the involvement by many NFLAs in the Group was influential and beneficial. The broad base of local authority support (and national park authority support) reflected widespread community concerns about the impact of the shutdown of nuclear facilities and the wastes that have been, and continue to be generated.

Manchester City Council and Cumbria County Council continue to provide an 'ad hoc' secretariat service to the SIG but both authorities recognise that this is unsustainable in the long term. A budget for SIG work had to be identified and the NFLA Steering Committee supported this providing it did not conflict with NFLAs longstanding and well established policy and research which covers a much broader area of local authority concerns e.g. nuclear safety and future energy policy.

Given that the SIG was created primarily to engage with the Government's radioactive waste management policy process (managed by the CoRWM) and nuclear decommissioning process (to be managed by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority from April next year) there is a unanimous view amongst SIG supporters, including those NFLAs engaged with the Group, that Government had a duty to provide funding.

The NFLA Steering Committee asked the Secretariat to provide a progress report on SIG development at its next meeting.

3. **New Nuclear Build**

The Steering Committee considered the increasing frequency and media profile of calls to reopen the debate about the need for a new programme of nuclear power station construction in the UK. It was noted that in June the NFLA Secretariat had issued to all supporting authorities the latest briefing (No.7) in the *New Nuclear Monitor* series. This briefing reviewed the issues to be addressed when considering new build including economics, public acceptability, and the unresolved question of policy to manage existing and future arisings of radioactive waste. The briefing restated NFLA policy for an open and transparent 'stakeholder' evaluation of nuclear power alongside other energy sources and whether it would be more effective to invest in measures to cut energy demand. The NFLA briefing paper had been forwarded to the Director of the new UK Energy Research Centre and a meeting has been requested to discuss how the Committee's 'stakeholder engagement' proposals could be implemented.

Considering these matters the Committee decided that the Secretariat should draft a model letter for NFLAs to use in lobbying their MPs to a) oppose current calls for new nuclear build and b) support NFLA policy for an open and transparent and ongoing stakeholder evaluation of options for meeting future energy need that considered the full economic, environmental and safety implications. (A model text is on the back page of this briefing and members in NFLA supporting authorities are urged to use it, or adapt it as appropriate, when writing to their local MP(s) seeking support for NFLA policy.)

4. **HSE Consultation on Criteria for Delicensing Nuclear Sites**

The Committee considered a draft response to HSE's consultation prepared by the Legal Adviser. The Legal Adviser considered that an amendment to the Nuclear Installations Act would be required to provide HSE with greater discretion to determine when a nuclear site no longer posed any danger to the public and could be released from regulatory control. A precautionary approach, which places greater emphasis on safety than economics, would be needed where there is scientific uncertainty concerning the impact of low level radiation. The Committee noted that the Committee Examining Radiation Risk of Internal Emitters (CERRIE) was due to report soon and it was expected to find that health risks from exposure to internal radiation emitters is significantly higher than presently estimated. New recommendations on tighter exposure limits had also been announced in May by the International Commission on Radiation Protection. In the circumstances the Committee decided to respond to the HSE saying its current proposals for new criteria to determine the meaning of 'no danger' were not acceptable.

5. **DTI Consultation on Radioactive Waste ‘Substitution’**

The Committee was informed of a submission by the Legal Adviser to DTI in response to a consultation about the costs and benefits of substituting smaller volumes of very high level radioactive waste to overseas customers rather than larger volumes of intermediate level wastes derived from reprocessing foreign spent nuclear fuel at Sellafield.

The NFLA submission endorsed points made by the LGA Special Interest Group and expanded on them. Both NFLAs and the SIG queried why this consultation was being called now when the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority will take charge of the Sellafield site from 1 April 2005. Any decision now by DTI on ‘substitution’ policy would limit the flexibility of the NDA in its strategy towards waste clean up. The NFLA submission also challenged many assertions in the consultation paper about the financial benefits of ‘substitution’ since figures were not explained and the history of the nuclear industry is one of costly mistakes and over optimistic financial forecasts.

6. **Mayors for Peace**

The Committee received an update on the international Mayors nuclear weapons abolition work, including the establishment of a new Mayors’ working group at the initiative of the former Deputy Mayor of London. The working group met for the first time at City Hall, London, on 2 July and planned to meet again in September. Both the Mayor of London and Mayor of Hiroshima sent messages of support to the Group in its efforts to increase awareness of the growing dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation and the need to confront it through strict international compliance with the universally\* accepted Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty that entered into force in 1970. (\*excepting Israel, India & Pakistan)

The Steering Committee agreed: that the NFLA Secretary should continue to assist international Mayors for Peace; that the video report of the Mayors work at the UN in New York be shown during the NFLA AGM and Annual Policy Briefing in October; and that the Glasgow Depute Lord Provost and the (now former) Deputy Mayor of London, be thanked for joining the international Mayors delegation to the UN in New York last April to lobby diplomats there for more progress on the disarmament obligations under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty.

7. **Aldermaston: Notice of Proposed Planning Development**

The Legal Adviser reported the new Notice of Proposed Development (NPD) that the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston had submitted to West Berkshire Council for a laser research facility. This laser facility will test existing nuclear weapons components but is also capable of assisting in the design of new nuclear weapons. Because MoD had not consulted on a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) the Legal Adviser had written to West Berkshire Council urging it to oppose the NDP. Because the laser facility could have profound nationally and internationally implications as well as local impacts, the English Forum of NFLAs, at their meeting on 2 July, called on Government to establish a full public inquiry into developments at Aldermaston. The Steering Committee considered a laser facility capable of maintaining existing warheads and designing new ones was clearly inconsistent with the Government’s obligation to eliminate nuclear weapons under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. The Secretary was asked to make this point at every available opportunity through the work of both the NFLAs and Mayors for Peace.

8. **2004 NFLA AGM & Annual Policy Briefing: Hull 14-15 October 2004**

It was reported that the Annual Policy Briefing programme had been finalised and that the focus would be on consumer protection and the impact of recycling radioactively contaminated materials into new consumer products or new construction. Nuclear industry and Environment Agency speakers were confirmed. The meeting recorded its thanks to Hull City Council for hosting this annual event and all councils not yet registered were urged to do so. (Full details available from the NFLA Secretariat or at [www.nuclearpolicy.info](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info))

## Draft text of letter for use in lobbying local MPs to support NFLA policy towards new nuclear build in the UK

To: (Name) MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Dear...

### New Nuclear Build

You will be aware of the increasing number of calls in different quarters for the Government to commit now to a new nuclear build programme to replace the existing stock of ageing nuclear stations. As you will know, existing Government policy is to review its position in 2006, though in February 2003 the then Energy Minister, Brian Wilson MP, said "If renewables and energy efficiency can prove themselves over the next 5 years there will be no need for new nuclear power stations."

The current clamour for new nuclear stations must be resisted. It would be very risky, economically and socially, to commit to any new nuclear build programme without a thorough and open evaluation of all available energy generation and conservation options. This would need to include a comparison of life cycle economic and commercial issues; public safety, security and acceptability issues; and near and long term environmental issues.

Advocates of new build wish to draw a line under past failures in the nuclear sector that forced the Government to restructure BNFL and the transfer of its liabilities (together with those of the UK Atomic Energy Authority) to the new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (w.e.f. 1 April 2005). On current estimates joint BNFL and UKAEA liabilities transferred to the taxpayer amount to a staggering £48 billion. British Energy, the privatised operator of the UK's AGR stations and the PWR at Sizewell, is also being financially restructured as I write, and would have collapsed last year had Government not stepped in with a £275 million 'overdraft' facility. The AP1000 reactor, promoted by 'new' BNFL's Westinghouse division for construction in the UK, is an unproven design that has not been subject to pre-licensing safety review by HSE's nuclear installations' inspectorate. The reactor design awaits certification in the United States.

Rather than clamour for one energy source over another the Nuclear Free Local Authorities\* have proposed that Government establishes, or funds, a balanced national independent stakeholder review panel that can openly and transparently consider and compare over time the costs and benefits of each energy generation and conservation option – and report regularly. The Government has already created the UK Energy Research Centre and its Director, Jim Skea, has described nuclear energy as a research priority. The Nuclear Free Local Authorities believe that this new body is well placed to take on this vital national task of evaluating and reporting on the UK's energy options and why any one or more approaches should be favoured over others.

My purpose in writing is to seek your support for this approach and ask you to recommend it to your Parliamentary colleagues and the Government.

I would be very pleased to have your response to this proposal in due course.

Etc...

\*See the NFLA *New Nuclear Monitor* Briefing No.7, June 2004 (additional copies available from the NFLA Secretariat)

For more information on any of the above matters contact: **Stewart Kemp** 0161 234 3244 or email: [office@nuclearpolicy.info](mailto:office@nuclearpolicy.info)