



Subject: **7th UK and Irish Standing Conference on Nuclear Hazards
10th - 11th March 2005, Drogheda.**

Nuclear Energy: Does it Have a Future?

The Conference was held against a background of press speculation that the UK Government is ready to launch a new nuclear power programme, if re-elected on 5th May. Officially, the Government's position remains that, although the nuclear option cannot be ruled out, there are no proposals to build more reactors.

Mr. Batt O'Keeffe, T.D. Irish Minister of State for Environment, Heritage and Local Government said for the Irish Government, there can be no future for nuclear energy, because of safety, security and accident risks - it has no role in a sustainable development policy - so it was disappointed the UK's Energy White Paper did not rule out new stations. Any perceived benefits in tackling climate change are outweighed by dangers; promoting nuclear energy undermines more sustainable solutions. There is still no demonstrated method of isolating waste from the environment for an adequate time.

Dr Morgan Bazilian, of Sustainable Energy Ireland, explained how Ireland currently meets its energy requirements, and its plans for the future. Like the UK, the percentage of gas-generated electricity has increased and coal-generated decreased over the last decade. This has led to a decrease in CO2 emissions. Increased efficiency means a de-coupling of growth in GDP and energy demand. Ireland is heavily dependant on imports, so is grappling with security of supply issues. It is promoting renewable energy by using market mechanisms as in the rest of Europe. Studies show that a substantial growth in wind energy will require some additional operating reserve, but this will be small. Despite China's plans to massively increase nuclear capacity, the International Energy Agency expects nuclear's share of world electricity generation to go down by 2030.

Neil Crumpton of Friends of the Earth Wales, sketched out a renewable energy scenario for the UK. Some say we should develop renewables as well as replace nuclear, but in practice funding for nuclear would detract from funding for renewables, and there are question marks over the availability of low-carbon supplies of uranium. Nuclear currently provides about 22% of UK electricity demand, but electricity is only part of the problem - a replacement nuclear programme would only tackle about 5% of greenhouse gas emissions - we must look far wider than just electricity. The waste heat produced in a year by the proposed 2GW combined-cycle gas turbine (CCGT) plant in Pembroke would contain the equivalent energy to the electricity generated in a year by both Wylfa and Trawsfynydd nuclear stations. By 2025, 13 million central heating boilers are likely to be replaced.



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If micro-combined-heat-and-power boilers are used instead of conventional boilers, these homes could be producing electricity equivalent to 13 nuclear stations. We need a renewable heat obligation and a renewable transport fuels obligation.

Prof. Brian Clark explained the work of the UK's Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM), which was about to announce its short-list of options for radioactive waste management, but it would not be identifying individual sites even in its final recommendations in July 2006.

Janet Bloomfield of the Oxford Research Group discussed the inextricable links between nuclear power and weapons, and the forthcoming Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference. A report commissioned by the US in 1946 said the pursuit of atomic energy and bombs are interchangeable and interdependent, so an international inspections regime based on good faith was doomed to fail. Unfortunately, Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" speech in 1953, became a major driver of nuclear proliferation, and the 1968 NPT is exactly what the 1946 report warned against – an inspection system superimposed on the otherwise uncontrolled exploitation of atomic energy. Now the black market network set up by Pakistan's now notorious AQ Khan shows that proliferation has moved beyond governments. Janet's recommendations included the removal of the promotion of nuclear power from the IAEA's mandate, and the establishment of an international fund for renewables.

Dr Gordon Thompson, Executive Director of the US based Institute for Resource & Security Studies, showed how nuclear plants could serve as pre-deployed radioactive weapons for terrorists with radiological damage hundreds of kilometers downwind - far worse than Chernobyl. A worst-case scenario might be a successful attack on Sizewell B - 100 miles from London - resulting in the loss of water from spent fuel ponds, and ignition of the fuel. Similar spent fuel ponds are likely to be installed at any new nuclear stations built in the UK. Of particular concern to Ireland are the liquid storage tanks containing high-level radioactive waste at Sellafield. An attack on these, if it destroyed the cooling system, might cause them to boil dry and release radioactive material contaminating parts of Ireland.

The Conference also heard from Fergus O'Dowd TD, Front Bench Spokesman on the Environment, who talked about the Irish Government's campaign to bring an end to reprocessing, and Trevor Sargent TD, Leader of the Irish Green Party, who said that global growth in nuclear power was reducing, whereas renewable energy was growing quickly.

Policy advisor to the Nuclear Free Local Authorities, Pete Roche, detailed some of the recent UK press speculation about a new White Paper on new nuclear stations after the General Election. His message was not to allow newspaper speculation to disable us by inducing panic. The practical obstacles to reviving nuclear construction, as detailed in several issues of the NFLA Briefings New Nuclear Monitor remain daunting. Solving these problems, if indeed solutions exist, will take time. There is unlikely to be an announcement about new nuclear stations immediately after the election. Government Ministers are still saying the nuclear industry will have to come up with an economically viable proposal. Press speculation is partly due to an orchestrated campaign by the nuclear industry. On the other hand, there are clearly discussions going on between officials and the industry about ways to finance new nuclear build. The nuclear industry is trying to figure out how best to get its hands on taxpayers' or consumers' money to subsidise its new reactors. When the Cabinet Office's Policy and Innovation Unit (PIU) examined the nuclear industry's cost estimates in 2001 it didn't find them believable. If public money is to be spent to drive carbon out of the economy, then any government is going to want the biggest carbon bang for its buck. Nuclear power is probably one of the least efficient ways of saving carbon - energy efficiency is up to seven times more effective.

Ten new reactors would more than double the existing amount of high-level waste or spent fuel. The nuclear waste issue will not be resolved in July 2006 when CoRWM reports to Government. A site selection process may be required. New reactor designs will have to be licensed by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) taking two or three years. After September 11th 2001 one might have expected that new reactors would be designed to be less vulnerable to terrorist attack. With the BNFL/Westinghouse AP1000 design, the most likely reactor type, the reverse appears to be the case. The public is going to find it very hard to understand why, if the situation is so serious with regard to terrorism that we need to lock up suspects without trial, or place people under house arrest, that the government is able to contemplate the creation of 10 more potential Chernobyls. Roche ended by calling for co-operation to ensure recent pro-nuclear campaigns herald the last final gasp of a dying industry, rather than a nuclear renaissance.

The Conference made the following recommendations for Action:-

Action 1: That Irish Councils consider association with the UK Nuclear Free Local Authorities and assist in the development of an All Ireland NFLA Forum and Standing Conference on Nuclear Hazards.

Action 2: That all local authorities consider contracting their future electricity supplies from renewable and non-nuclear energy providers.

Action 3: That all councils consider the opportunities for renewable generation and energy conservation when developing policy and when considering large commercial and residential planning application.

Action 4: Irish councils to ask their Government to examine whether state aid to the nuclear industry in Europe eg. EdF, TVO, NDA, contravenes competition legislation.

Action 5: That all Councils participate in the current consultations on radioactive waste management policy in the UK (CoRWM) and the justification for operating reprocessing facilities at Sellafield (NDA).

Action 6: That Irish Councils consider whether they can send a representative to participate in the international Mayors delegation at the NPT in New York in May.

Action 7: That all councils recognise and highlight in their documentation the direct links between nuclear weapons and energy technologies.

Action 8: That Irish Councils seek a meeting with Government regarding the adequacy of (a) UK assurances about safety and security of UK nuclear facilities, including Sellafield, and (b) the Irish Government's nuclear emergency plan.