



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 14th May 2014

NFLA shares concerns about imminent radioactive discharges into the Blackwater River and Estuary in Essex

The NFLA shares the real concerns of the community organisation 'Bradwell Against New Nuclear Group' (BANNG) about the environmental and health impacts that could occur if anticipated discharges of dissolved radioactive debris into the Blackwater River and Estuary are commenced by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) Magnox site at Bradwell. (1)

In February 2014, the NFLA submitted a critical response to the NDA's proposed strategy for dealing with Fuel Element Debris (FED) from Bradwell and other English and Welsh nuclear sites. FED waste is the radioactive metal and graphite stripped from the highly radioactive spent fuel at nuclear sites, before the fuel itself is transported to Sellafield. This process involves dissolving the FED using nitric acid at a new dissolution plant, which has never been used before on such a commercial scale, at the Bradwell site.

The NFLA response to the NDA's proposed strategy argued that it breached several important environmental principles by failing to concentrate and contain waste on site. (2)

As BANNG have pointed out, the reasons why the NDA are looking to undertake this new commercial process at Bradwell is that it considerably reduces the volumes of FED, thereby saving on storage costs, and that it can be completed quickly, within a matter of eighteen months, thus enabling the Bradwell site to enter its long-term (until 2100) care and maintenance decommissioned phase. However, this new process varies significantly from the dissolution process undertaken at Dungeness in Kent, which uses carbonic acid and takes between 15 and 18 years to complete. BANNG also note that Dungeness stands on the open sea and not in a shallow estuary like the Blackwater, meaning radioactive discharges are more likely to concentrate in the area. The independent marine radiation specialist Tim Deere-Jones has produced a number of reports for the NFLA highlighting the problems of such marine radioactive discharges in estuarine sites. (3)

BANNG have also pointed out that the clear downside of this process is that around 15% of the radioactivity contained in the FED will be discharged into the environment, presenting unknowable risks to it and human health. NFLA share BANNG's concerns that the Environment Agency have granted an environmental permit for this process, claiming that there will not be any unacceptable environmental or health risks from radioactive discharges into the Blackwater. NFLA are also disappointed to hear that the NDA rejected the request for a public meeting on this matter. NFLA believe such a meeting would show to the local community that the NDA and other agencies are serious in being open and transparent in understanding local concerns before implementing such a controversial new procedure. In the NFLA's view, the NDA should halt all plans for discharges until such a meeting can be held.

As a general principle, NFLA remain concerned with the ongoing practice of marine and estuarine radioactive discharges and the effect they are having on the local environment. To start a new discharge process without fully understanding its impact, and explaining that impact fully to the local community, is hugely disappointing. The NFLA are pleased that there is currently a legal challenge in place to allow some time for more considered reflection. NFLA also believe the NDA and the Environment Agency should seek an independent assessment of this process before any discharges into the marine and estuarine environment takes place.

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NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“I share BANNG’s concerns about the proposals to dump discharges of dissolved radioactive debris into the Blackwater River and Estuary. NFLA continue to believe discharges into the marine environment should be avoided. That a new and commercially untried process like this is being used without a full independent assessment is troubling to me. I call on the NDA to reverse their decision and hold an urgent public meeting to fully explain this new activity to the local communities around the Blackwater Estuary, and why they are undertaking this activity. A meeting could include independent critics of such activities so as to provide balance, accountability and challenge to the public agencies planning these discharges. Surely it is in the public interest for the NDA to organise such a meeting as soon as is practical?”

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930196.

Notes for editors:

- (1) BANNG media release, 13th May 2014 sent to the NFLA and media outlets. For a copy of the media release contact BANNG’s press officer, Varrie Blowers - 07932 644482 or email address: varrieblowers@yahoo.com.
- (2) NFLA Radioactive Waste Policy Briefing 46, ‘NFLA response to Nuclear Decommissioning Authority credible options for FED and ILW in England and Wales’, February 2014. http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/radwaste/Rad_Waste_Brfg_46_NDA_FED_ILW_response.pdf
- (3) See Tim Deere-Jones presentation to the NFLA meeting in Caernarfon on the 22nd March 2014: http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/events/220314/TDJ_marine_effects_NFLA.pdf

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