



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 4th December 2012

NFLA comment on Irish Government Sellafield report – are we really that sure there are no risks to Ireland from the facility?

The NFLA notes the publication of the Republic of Ireland Government's report on potential risks from Sellafield but seriously questions whether the report's view of a lack of risks from the facility to Ireland are as obvious as the report suggests (1).

The report was commissioned by the Irish Government's Environment Department and drafted by a number of largely American based nuclear specialists. Using a 'probabilistic risk assessment' method they concluded there was 'no observable health risks' from a large number of accident scenarios and even more extreme incidents like aircraft crashes and earthquakes.

In the NFLA's view it is essential that the Irish Government conducts a much wider level of research on the risks from Sellafield and other UK based nuclear facilities than this single report. It does though welcome the fact that it has commissioned such a report and shown an interest in this important issue. It also welcomes the additional Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland's wider study on the risks to Ireland of a UK new nuclear build programme, in order to stimulate an important and often overlooked public debate; but again it is concerned that this study may also not be bringing into this discussion other independent, more critical voices (2).

The NFLA has a number of comments to make on this report and related issues with Sellafield:

- The report that has been published is a summary note and it ends by saying 'the information contained in this report is highly sensitive. Its release in full would add to the risks to both Ireland and the UK.' As this is the case, it is extremely difficult for independent organisations like the NFLA to know the detail and the methodology behind the study, the statistics used for it and what health figures they have used in ascertaining exposure to radiation. NFLA would welcome a meeting with the Irish Government and the authors, behind closed doors if necessary, to ascertain how the authors came to these particular conclusions.
- The membership of the expert group does not appear to have any radiobiologists and other specialists in the effects of low level radiation on human health. It is a report which seems to be constructed around statistical risk assessment and it is not clear what level of specific scientific investigation lies within it. Why did the Irish Government not discuss the development of the report within the wider scientific community or with groups like the NFLA beforehand?
- In its submission to the UK Chief Nuclear Inspector's review on the causes of the Fukushima disaster, the NFLA published comments made by the independent nuclear engineering expert M V Ramana which questioned the robustness of the probabilistic risk assessment model. Mr Ramana noted "Probabilistic risk assessment models do not account for unexpected failure modes during many nuclear accidents." He noted a 2007 earthquake which saw radioactive materials going into the sea from the Kashiwazaki Kariwa reactors in Japan, and the Fukushima incident itself in 2011, as examples where the probabilistic risk assessment had not anticipated such radiation leaks, and yet they still happened (3).
- There can also be confusion as to what is the actual health effects of even low level radiation exposure from the regulatory bodies is. An obvious recent example relates to the radiation contamination at Dalgety Bay in Fife. The UK Health Protection Agency argued the health effects from radiation exposure was very low. Yet just days later the independent Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) reported much higher than anticipated liver and blood cancers in the local area. The NFLA would like to see as a result

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further Irish studies from other agencies and independent bodies so as to put this latest Irish Government study into its proper context. (4)

- The NFLA note a 2010 Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority report noting that “the environmental consequences for Norway following a hypothetical accident at Sellafield – with a release of 1 % of the total assumed inventory contained in the B215 HASTs – will according to our model predictions be severe, particularly in connection to sheep and goat production.” (5)
- The NFLA also would like to know what the Irish Government’s reactions are to the recent UK National Audit Office’s report on Sellafield which concluded that “some of the older facilities have deteriorated so much that their contents pose significant risks to people and the environment” and present “intolerable risks” for the future. (6)
- The NFLA note continuing discharges of low level marine radioactivity into the Irish Sea from the Sellafield reprocessing facility. At the last OSPAR Radiation Substances Committee it was reported by the UK Government that these had increased. The NFLA’s is concerned that the UK Government’s 2020 commitment for ‘close to zero’ discharges from Sellafield may not be met (7). An increased new nuclear build programme may also see a significant increase in marine, land and atmospheric radioactive discharges into the Irish Sea, as the NFLA have argued in its recent submission to the Environment Agency on a proposed Hinkley Point new reactor in Somerset, off the Bristol Channel (8).
- The NFLA note the 2012 Northern Ireland Cancer Registry report which records significantly higher cancer rates concentrated solely in a number of east coast estuary sites (9).

Given all these issues, the NFLA is much more circumspect in its view on the health, economic, environmental, scientific and technical risks of the Sellafield site to Ireland. The NFLA continues to welcome the Irish Government’s legal stance of being opposed to nuclear power and hope it continues to lobby for this at the European level, and in bilateral discussions with the UK, for the safe decommissioning and management of the UK nuclear legacy and for no development of new nuclear facilities.

NFLA All Ireland Forum Co Chair, Councillor Mark Dearey said:

“Whilst I welcome the Irish Government commissioning a report into the risks to Ireland from the Sellafield facility, I am concerned that this report overstates the issue and downplays legitimate and long-standing concerns over the facility and its potential impact to Ireland, which previous Irish Governments have regularly acknowledged. I encourage the Irish Government and the report authors to follow the example of the Radiological Institute of Ireland in accepting an invitation from the NFLA to present these issues to its next meeting, where we will also invite other independent experts who have provided the NFLA with a quite different view on Sellafield. By such positive engagement we may come to some different conclusions.”

NFLA All Ireland Forum Co Chair, Councillor Michael Carr, added:

“The recently published Northern Ireland Cancer Registry report noted that 11 out of the 80 postcode areas in the North had higher than average figures in the ‘all cancers’ category. All of these 11 areas have an estuary or coastline element. I am concerned part of these higher cancer rates could well originate from the radiation discharges from sites like Sellafield. I want to see both Irish Governments conducting more independent research on why these worrying figures continue to exist.”

Ends

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Notes to editors:

- (1) Irish Government Environment Department report, 'Risks to Ireland from Incidents at the Sellafield site, issued 28th November 2012
<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Environment/EnvironmentalRadiation/FileDownload,31607,en.pdf>
- (2) Ciara McMahon from the RPII gave an initial presentation on its methodology of the risks to Ireland of a UK new nuclear build programme to the NFLA All Ireland Forum in Downpatrick on the 12th October and will present the final report to the next NFLA All Ireland Forum meeting in March 2013. The RPII report is expected to be published in early 2013.
- (3) M.V. Ramana: 'Beyond our imagination – Fukushima and problems of assessing risk', Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, 19th April 2011. <http://www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/features/beyond-our-imagination-fukushima-and-the-problem-of-assessing-risk>
- (4) HPA media release on Dalgety Bay, 29th October 2012
<http://www.hpa.gov.uk/NewsCentre/NationalPressReleases/2012PressReleases/121029HPAspellouthriskyatDalgetyBaybeach>
The COMARE report can be downloaded from Rob Edwards Sunday Herald story link, 10th October 2012. <http://www.robedwards.typepad.com/files/report-to-comare-10-october-2012-redacted.pdf>
- (5) Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority, 'Consequences in Norway after a hypothetical accident at Sellafield', 20th December 2010. <http://www.nrpa.no/dav/0942d3dc93.pdf>
- (6) National Audit Office – 'Managing risk reduction at Sellafield', 7th November 2012
http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/1213/sellafield_risk_reduction.aspx
- (7) See section on OSPAR RSC discussion on defining 'close to zero' discharges in NFLA Policy Briefing 103, 19th November 2012.
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/NFLA_Policy_Briefing_103_International_Alliances.pdf
- (8) See NFLA New Nuclear Monitor 29, NFLA joint response to Environment Agency consultation on draft permits for a proposed new nuclear reactor at Hinkley Point, November 2012.
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/nuclearmonitor/NFLA_New_Nuclear_Monitor_29.pdf
- (9) A link to the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry 2012 report can be found here, 12th October 2012. <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dhssps/news-dhssps-120612-publication-of-the.htm>

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