



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA media release - for immediate release, 15th October 2013

UK radioactive waste management consultation – NFLA advocates that the Government goes back to the drawing board

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) publishes today its overview and a model response for its member authorities in responding to the UK Government's consultation on the 'Managing Radioactive Waste Safely' (MRWS) policy (1).

NFLA are very disappointed and quite alarmed with the centralising tendency proposed within this consultation and the reduction in the role of County Councils in the decision-making body. It advocates that the Government goes back to the drawing board with a policy that fully considers long-term safe interim storage of waste, tackles the hundreds of technical and scientific issues of concern with 'geological disposal' and commits itself much more wholeheartedly to openness and transparency to encourage positive community support.

The 12 week consultation by the Department of Energy and Climate Change's (DECC) 'Managing Radioactive Waste Safely' (MRWS) process (2) reiterates many points from its previous attempt to find a solution to this policy, which was rejected earlier this year by Cumbria County Council (3). These include a continued commitment to constructing a 'geological disposal facility' (GDF) whilst not looking in detail at alternative storage solutions, a commitment to voluntarism but a dilution of the 'two tier' Council support for site selection, and a reaffirmation of the economic benefits of a geological disposal facility whilst ignoring many of the disadvantages that brought about Cumbria County Council's earlier negative decision.

The NFLA model response to the DECC consultation was fully discussed at a meeting of the NFLA Steering Committee in Manchester on the 4th October. Members unanimously endorsed the response and encouraged its member authorities to submit responses similar in content to it.

The key conclusions of the NFLA model response to the MRWS consultation include:

- The Government's proposals represent a highly counter-productive move back to centralised control, whilst continuing to pay lip service to voluntarism. This consultation document should be withdrawn and the Government should go back to the drawing board.
- The previous process failed partly because of the intractability of the nuclear waste problem, but also because of the Government's refusal to accept most of the recommendations of its own advisory committee – the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM).
- CoRWM recommended a high level of public engagement in any future process. This has been ignored.
- The scope of this consultation is focussed solely on finding a site for a geological repository when the priority should clearly be the development of robust interim storage.
- There should be a national debate about whether the process should be looking for the best geology for the job or whether to use mediocre geology and rely more heavily on very expensive engineered barriers.
- The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's (NDA) Radioactive Waste Management Directorate (RWMD) has listed 900 outstanding scientific and technical issues with a deep underground repository which still need to be resolved. The process of resolving these issues needs to be much more open and transparent.
- Any assessment of community support for a radioactive waste proposal needs to be on the basis of informed consent. The idea that because District Councils have full-time staff they can somehow become better qualified to make a judgement on a highly complicated area of scientific

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controversy is absurd. Funding needs to be provided so that Councils can commission independent advice and so that non governmental organisations (NGOs) can provide a critical voice.

- Any public awareness campaign needs to be organised by an independent body, not the developer, and should be carried out on the basis that all sides of the debate are represented fairly with equal resources.
- The Government must drop the idea of using the nationally significant infrastructure planning regime for a deep underground radioactive waste repository.
- The Government should produce a baseline inventory which does not include new build reactors, and a Maximum Inventory which shows the impact of a 16GW new build programme. It should enshrine in any future process the principle that any community willing to host nuclear waste facilities should get a say in the inventory of waste committed to those facilities.
- The Government must re-visit CoRWM's idea of a separate process which can examine the ethics of producing more waste in the face of the uncertainties involved with nuclear waste management.
- Communities faced with proposals for nuclear waste facilities in their vicinity should be funded to produce alternative economic strategies so that no-one has to decide to accept such a facility because they feel there is no alternative.

Councillor Mark Hackett, Chair of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) said:

“NFLA calls on DECC to withdraw this consultation paper and come back with a more rounded policy that is not constantly trying to find a West Cumbrian ‘Plan A’ but a sensible ‘Plan B’ which includes safe long-term interim storage, investment to improve the Sellafield site and a full geological survey of the UK. Diluting Cumbria County Council’s potential role in a future process, just because other Councils said ‘yes’ to a repository, is a deeply cynical move. It is not an appropriate way to respond to the genuine concerns held by many in the county that hosts the largest amount of radioactive waste in the UK. NFLA calls on the Government to yet again rethink this badly flawed policy.”

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Notes for editors:

- (1) The NFLA model response to the DECC consultation is attached with this media release.
- (2) DECC Media Release, 12th September 2013
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-consulted-on-radioactive-waste-disposal-site>
- (3) BBC Online, 30th January 2013 <http://bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-21253673>

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