



*Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee*

# information

**Media release - For immediate release, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2010 -**

**Are the nuclear shipments leaving the UK truly safe? NFLA raises concern over the reprocessed HLW fuel shipments to Japan**

The UK and Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) are raising their concerns today over the safety of the fleet being used to transport reprocessed High Level Radioactive Waste (HLW) nuclear fuel from Sellafield via Barrow in Cumbria, which is about to be transported presently to Japan.

The Pacific Sandpiper, owned by Pacific Nuclear Transport Ltd (PNTL), has been prepared to transport large volumes of reprocessed nuclear fuel from the Sellafield plant in Cumbria, bound for a shipment of thousands of miles to Japan. This is the first ever shipment of HLW from Sellafield to Japan, and it is expected that 1850 canisters will be eventually shipped to Japan, the Netherlands and other countries over the next few years (1). Yet this shipment is using the oldest of the PNTL fleet and a number of important safety concerns remain.

Independent marine pollution consultant, Tim Deere-Jones, who has produced a detailed briefing on nuclear material shipments over the Irish Sea for the NFLA (2), comments:

“The Pacific Sandpiper is now the oldest member of the PNTL fleet, it and its predecessors, were designed in the 1970s and have been shown to be susceptible to run away corrosion problems which has caused premature decommissioning of the earlier, older vessels.

The Pacific Sandpiper has recently been issued with **three** Statutory Memos demanding the completion of work related to crew safety, Emergency Towing Procedures, and engine room fire extinguishing systems. The available evidence implies that this work has not yet been carried out.

During recent Port State Control Inspections in Europe and Japan, the Pacific Sandpiper has been shown to have a number of deficiencies including Fire Safety measures.

The Asia Pacific Port State Control Inspection (PSCI) organisation’s website currently reports that the Pacific Sandpiper has a **Target Factor of 81** and a **High Risk Level**.

**If this vessel was an oil or chemical tanker, seeking to carry a full cargo of oil or toxic chemicals across two major oceans and through the globally identified Marine High Risk Areas between the UK and Japan, it would be considered as a pariah ship and a potential toxic time bomb. (3)”**

The NFLA receives this information with great concern. As the nuclear shipments resume in earnest after a lull of several years, the NFLA believes such dangerous shipments – susceptible to potential terrorist attacks or other risks – need to be, at the very least, fully safe for a shipment over such a long distance.

NFLA UK and Ireland Chair, Bailie George Regan comments:

“ I am greatly alarmed by the safety case of the Pacific Sandpiper and the concerns raised by Tim Deere-Jones. The NFLA has had major concerns over many years whether it is safe or appropriate to undertake such dangerous shipments halfway across the world in the first place, but to do it in old, potentially shoddy ships increases my sense of alarm. The NFLA will be raising these concerns with the UK Government and asking the Irish Government to raise the matter at a ministerial level.”

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Meanwhile, the NFLA is in correspondence with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) over the level and emergency preparedness of the relevant regulatory bodies and local authorities in the event of an emergency incident over such a shipment on the Irish Sea. A detailed response from the MCA is expected imminently (4).

## Ends

### Further information

Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary 07771 930196 or 0161 234 3244

Tim Deere-Jones, Independent marine pollution consultant 01834 871011

### Notes to Editors:

(1) Press briefing of CORE (Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment) – ‘Preparations for first ever HLW shipment from Sellafield’, 27<sup>th</sup> November, <http://www.corecumbria.co.uk>

(2) NFLA briefing on Nuclear material shipments can be found on the NFLA website. The report can be downloaded from [http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/NFLA\\_briefing\\_66.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/NFLA_briefing_66.pdf).

(3) Further information on the Pacific Sandpiper from Tim Deere-Jones:

### Pacific Sandpiper

#### Port State Control Inspections

Port State Control Inspections (PSCI) are carried out to satisfy the state that ships visiting it's ports meet the required standards laid down in the various International Conventions on safety at sea and marine pollution.

The general approach used by Port States is to set overall percentage inspection rates to ensure that a minimum of ships are inspected each year.

Additionally, PSCI managers use a series of Targeting Factors (TF) to focus inspection effort on those ships most likely to be substandard.

#### European PSCI

The Pacific Sandpiper was last inspected in **Europe (Cherbourg) in 2008**. On 12 Feb 2008 the Sandpiper was found to have **1 deficiency: category Fire Safety Measures (no more specific details available)**.

**However, the Sandpiper was re-inspected in November 2008 when no further deficiencies were found.**

#### Japanese PSCI

Japanese PSCI's are carried out under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Port State Control : Asia Pacific Region.

The Pacific Sandpiper was last inspected in Japan in 2007 (twice). **On 04/04/2007 1 deficiency was found** (no details of deficiency available). Vessel re-inspected 08/09/2007 when no further deficiencies identified. Earlier inspections (previous years had also identified a number of faults).

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The latest posting on the Asia Pacific Memorandum of Understanding website relating to the Pacific Sandpiper states that the **PSCI Target Factor of the Sandpiper = Target Factor 81. Risk Level: HIGH.**

The elevated Target Factor (81) for the Sandpiper derives from a combination of the age of the ship, the number of previous deficiencies and the length of time since the last inspections were completed.

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## Survey Status

Relevant websites show that Survey status for the Pacific Sandpiper appears generally good, however 3 Statutory Notices memos have been issued and appear to be still in force. The memos are as follows:

SN1: 5 yearly load tests should be carried out on accommodation ladders, gangplanks and associated winches.

SN2: It is to be confirmed that vessel has an Emergency Towing Procedure (ETP) on board. The ETP must be placed on board no later than 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012. Upon verification of this action the memo is to be deleted.

N.B. As of 24<sup>th</sup> January 2010 that memo has NOT been deleted, it must therefore be assumed that there is no ETP in place.

*Furthermore, the Sandpiper is reported to be due for retirement (now 25 years old) and the company says it will NOT carry any future shipments. There seems to be little reason for the ETP to be put in place.*

SN3: It is to be confirmed that engine room fixed CO2 is fitted with 2 separate controls for release as per FFS Code chapter 5.2.2.2. Dual controls for CO2 fixed extinguishing systems must be confirmed no later than the first scheduled dry-docking after 1st January 2010. Upon verification of this action the memo is to be deleted.

NB. As of 24<sup>th</sup> January 2010 that memo has NOT been deleted. Since the Sandpiper is reported to be due for retirement (now 25 years old) and the company says it will NOT carry any future shipments, there seems to be little reason for the Dual Control Fire Extinguishing System to be put in place.

(4) The NFLA Secretariat wrote to the UK and Irish Governments in April / May 2009 with specific questions on emergency planning arrangements around such shipments. The UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency responded in detail in September 2009. After due consideration a detailed follow-up letter was sent by the NFLA Secretariat to the MCA. The NFLA Secretariat has been informed a response will be sent by the MCA shortly to this letter.