



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 20th March 2012

NFLA submits its views on West Cumbrian deep-underground radioactive waste repository – Cumbria is not the right location for it

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) has submitted today its official response to the West Cumbrian Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) Partnership consultation, stating that West Cumbria is not an appropriate location for such a facility. It recommends that the three West Cumbrian Councils involved in this process – Cumbria County Council, Copeland and Allerdale Councils – to not go further ahead with this process (1).

The NFLA viewpoint comes on the back of 8 Cumbrian Parish Councils passing resolutions opposing the development of a deep-underground radioactive waste facility in Cumbria. Two South Lakeland Councillors who are members of the Partnership, along with Churches Together in Cumbria, have also expressed the view that they cannot support going into the next stage of the process to host a repository (2).

The West Cumbria MRWS Partnership is seeking public views on whether it should go ahead with the next stage of the voluntarist process to formally express an interest in potentially being the host community for a deep-underground radioactive waste repository. The three West Cumbrian Councils are the only Councils in the UK to have shown an initial interest in hosting a facility to cater for all higher activity radioactive waste (3).

The key points of the NFLA submission to the public consultation are:

- The NFLA does not believe the areas covered by Allerdale and/or Copeland Borough Councils should take part in the search for a potential location for a nuclear waste repository.
- The NFLA view is that it will be impossible to demonstrate with any scientific credibility that the resultant radiation dose to people from a nuclear waste repository would be at an acceptably low level into the far distant future.
- More research is required on uncertainties associated with deep geological “disposal” as well as robust interim storage before proceeding to a site selection process.
- If voluntarism is to mean anything, local communities must be given the right to withdraw from the process at any time up to the start of construction. Local Authorities must not be allowed to override local wishes.
- The NFLA agrees with the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) that a new nuclear programme raises different political and ethical issues when compared with the consideration of legacy wastes. CoRWM said new wastes should be subject to a separate public assessment process. By going ahead to the next stage of the process before the generation of new wastes has been given adequate consideration Cumbrian authorities will be being complicit in depriving other authorities (for example those on waste transport routes) of a proper say on the future of UK energy policy.
- The NFLA view is that there should be a national debate about what constitutes suitable geology and how to find it before Cumbrian authorities proceed to the next stage. We should not allow the voluntarist approach to override the idea of finding the safest possible method to manage these dangerous wastes.
- The Partnership should have made clear in the consultation materials that, in the event of a 16GW new build programme around half of the waste, by volume, destined for the repository is not yet located in Cumbria.
- Given that the Government has agreed with the Partnership’s third Inventory Principle to inform a Community Siting Partnership at the earliest opportunity when significant changes occur to the

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'upper' inventory, the Partnership should have pressed the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to produce an upper inventory which looked at a 16GW new nuclear programme.

- DECC has said it will discuss emplacing spent fuel from new nuclear reactors in the repository with the host community if the process proceeds – implying that the community would have the option of deciding only to accept legacy wastes. The Partnership needs to ask DECC now what the implications would be if the host community said it would only take legacy waste. The Partnership also needs to ask DECC to address the issue of the probability that the risk limit for a single repository being exceeded in the event of inclusion of waste from new reactors.
- It is the NFLA view that, should the Cumbrian authorities move on to the next stage, the momentum in the process will be too great to allow withdrawal in future. Cumbria could, therefore end up not only with a disposal facility which takes all the spent fuel from new reactors, but also with more than one dump.

NFLA Chair Councillor Brian Goodall said:

"The NFLA have consistently opposed the development of a deep underground radioactive waste repository because it is deeply concerned with the many technical and scientific uncertainties that remain unanswered with such a complicated development. The Scottish Government policy of near site, near service, monitorable and retrievable stores seem a much more sensible approach to me. I also believe the geology of West Cumbria is clearly not suitable for a deep-underground facility and as such the NFLA urges the West Cumbrian Councils to not move on to the next stage of this process. A better solution must be found."

Ends

Further information - Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930186 or Pete Roche, NFLA Steering Committee Policy Advisor (contact via the NFLA Secretary).

Notes to editors:

- (1) The NFLA Radioactive Waste Briefing 32 on the MRWS consultation is attached with this media release.
- (2) Save our Lake District media release, 14th March 2012.
<http://www.mrwsold.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/SOLD-Press-March-14th-2-2-12.doc>
- (3) See West Cumbria Managing Radioactive Waste Safely website for further details.
<http://www.westcumbriamrws.org.uk>