



*Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee*

# information

**NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

## **NFLA submits views on plutonium reuse to UK Government – immobilisation rather than MoX fuel use urged by the NFLA**

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) has submitted today its views to the UK Government on the proposed justification process around the possible reuse of the national stockpile of weapons-usable plutonium (1).

The published preliminary view of the UK Government is that the stockpile of weapons usable material should be converted to reactor fuel known as MoX (mixed oxide fuel) at a new facility to be developed at Sellafield (2). Two potential reactor options being put forward are the Candu reactors from Canada and the PRISM reactors being proposed by General Electric Hitachi of the USA. The NFLA have consistently argued that plutonium should rather be immobilised and stored safely as radioactive waste.

The key conclusions of the NFLA submission are:

- This consultation is premature while the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) is looking at alternatives to the MoX route.
- If the NDA can investigate reactor-based alternatives to the reprocessing of plutonium in a Mixed Oxide Fuel (MoX) facility, it should also re-examine plutonium immobilisation, as has been recommended by the Chair of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Allison Macfarlane.
- There should be an examination of the health implications of using MoX fuel in conventional reactors, including during accidents, before proceeding with the construction of a MoX fuel fabrication plant, otherwise we could find that we have produced a fuel which cannot be licensed for use in UK reactors. Such an examination could take the form of a pre-licensing procedure and examination of the safety case for using MoX in an EPR and/or AP1000 reactor.
- A Justification exercise based on underestimated costs will not give a reliable result. The Government should examine the reasons for the large cost overruns of the American nuclear industry MoX programme.
- The lack of maturity of the immobilisation option is a poor argument given that there is substantial literature on how to do it. The UK Government should be prepared to pioneer this new technology in any case for the benefit of global non-proliferation efforts.
- The Canadian Candu reactor option being put forward as an option offers no advantage over the MoX Fuel option and the American PRISM reactor option threatens to keep plutonium in circulation and encourage the spread of the plutonium fuel-cycle and hence nuclear proliferation around the globe.
- There has been a general lack of research and development into the problems likely to be encountered in managing spent MoX Fuel. The waste implications of all plutonium management options should be examined.

NFLA Chair Councillor Brian Goodall said:

“It saddens me that the UK Government is still contemplating the construction of new MoX fuel facilities to deal with our huge legacy of weapons usable plutonium, when previous MoX facilities at Sellafield have been such expensive failures. The NFLA consistently believe the safest and most environmentally sound option is for the plutonium to be immobilised and safely managed so that future generations can be sure that this material is creating no further unacceptable risks. Like with nuclear new build, we should be looking at imaginative waste management options to deal with our nuclear legacy, rather than creating new white elephant facilities that future generations will not thank us for.”

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**Notes to editors:**

- (1) The NFLA model response is attached with this media release.
- (2) The DECC consultation document can be downloaded from:  
<http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/consultation/mgmt-plutonium-stocks/5376-mgmt-uk-plutonium-stocks-cons.pdf>

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