



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

MEDIA ADVISORY – for immediate release, 4th August 2011

Sellafield MOX plant closure – the closure of one white elephant should not be followed by developing another one

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) welcomes the closure of the Sellafield Mixed Oxide Plant (MOX) by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) and encourages the NDA to relocate the staff that will lose their jobs on to other essential decommissioning work on the site (1). It also urges the UK Government not to develop its 'preliminary policy view' (2) and develop a new MOX plant but rather seek to continue to develop solutions to safely immobilise and store the UK's stockpile of weapons-grade plutonium.

The decision by the NDA comes as a result of the Fukushima incident which still 5 months later is releasing radiation at lethal levels into the atmosphere and the local environment. The Japanese nuclear industry was the only major customer of the Sellafield MOX plant and the closure of two thirds of that industry, and continued public pressure for these reactors to remain closed, provides little economic reason for keeping the Sellafield facility open.

The NFLA has consistently argued, over many years, that the development and operation of the Sellafield MOX plant was unnecessary, uneconomic and a huge waste of public money. Over £1.4 billion has been spent on the plant since it was commissioned in the early 1990s and millions more will now have to be spent decommissioning it. And what do we have to show for it? A plant expected to burn 120 tonnes of the reactor fuel each year has managed just 13.8 tonnes in its entire lifetime. Sellafield's reprocessing plant is also a major factor in why discharges into the Irish Sea remain a matter of tension with the Irish Government and a major concern for the potential of nuclear terrorism given that it is transported by ship over thousands of miles, with all the risks that entails. A shipment is now on its way to Japan, in a move opposed by Caribbean governments (3).

This whole sorry experience also emphasises that the highly risky financial models for building new nuclear reactors should be reconsidered immediately by the UK Government and the strategy rejected in favour of developing a wider renewable energy mix, the co-operation of Councils in developing imaginative energy efficiency programmes and the encouragement of a decentralised energy market with community-orientated microgeneration projects. On Monday 8th August the NFLA will publish an important policy briefing showing how such an enlightened policy will provide more than enough energy without recourse to new nuclear power, allowing for the safe decommissioning and storage of the existing nuclear legacy.

NFLA UK and Ireland Chair Bailie George Regan says:

"I am pleased that the NDA has finally seen sense and closed the Sellafield MOX plant, one of the most expensive white elephants built on the public purse in the last 20 years. It is one of the more positive developments following the terrible Fukushima disaster. I hope the people who work at the MOX facility can be usefully placed on the decommissioning of this plant and other facilities at Sellafield to make it safe for generations to come. Above all, this decision shows that we should never look at reprocessing spent nuclear fuel in the future and rather develop a renewable energy revolution. If Germany, Switzerland, Japan and much of Europe can do it, it is about time the UK Government follow the example of Scotland and Ireland and start investing public money in a sustainable, clean, green energy policy."

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For interviews contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 07771 930196.

Notes for editors:

- (1) See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/aug/03/sellafield-mox-plant-close>
- (2) DECC consultation on the long-term management of the UK's stockpile of weapons grade plutonium.
- (3) See CORE press release <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/aug/03/sellafield-mox-plant-close>

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