



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

For immediate release, 9th November 2009

Nuclear Free Local Authorities deeply concerned about democratic deficit, safety and costs issues in the drive for new nuclear build

The UK and Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities are dismayed with today's decision to develop as many as 15 new nuclear power stations and see it as a missed opportunity in developing much more sustainable renewable energy alternatives. It is particularly disappointing as the Government as recently as 2003 said nuclear power had no part to play in a future energy mix (1).

The announcement today by Climate Change and Energy Minister Ed Miliband that new nuclear build is a priority for the Government is not a surprise. The Nuclear Free Local Authorities agrees that a good energy mix is vital for the UK, but that could be achieved by a major expansion of different forms of renewable energy – wind, tidal, CHP, solar – coupled with a more concerted policy of energy efficiency and the promotion of a greater amount of micro-generation projects. Other countries such as Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Germany and Spain have taken such a bold course and it is disappointing that nuclear power is being preferred here.

Nuclear power has 4 basic problems:

- there are regular issues reported in the media over the safety design of new reactors;
- the set-up costs are likely to be heavy and burgeoning and will reduce the resources for cleaner, sustainable renewable alternatives;
- experience has shown that new nuclear power stations often take much longer to build at a time when the pressing needs of climate change mitigation requires a swifter alternative;
- the radioactive waste legacy has still not been dealt with after 5 decades of the nuclear industry, leaving our grandchildren and generations after that to deal with the mistakes that could be made now. New waste generated now will be much more radioactive than the waste that still hasn't been dealt with.

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities will make a detailed submission both to the national energy policy statements and to the Minister's 'justification' response as required by European law.

A key part of the NFLA submission will be to raise legitimate concerns over the democratic deficit as the unelected Infra-structure Planning Commission (IPC) commences the process of determining planning permission for new nuclear power stations. As Hugh Ellis, Chief Planner of the Town and Country Planning Association, reported at a recent NFLA seminar in Liverpool on the IPC (2): "The IPC is an unelected, undemocratic body – the new Commissioners aren't directly accountable to the people that their decisions affect. It's going to be very difficult for local people to get their voices heard, especially with key documents being so technical and opportunities to attend inquiries so few. If people are unhappy with the process they'll have to take the matter to court, which is extremely difficult and costly."

The NFLA will note in its consultation that a full public inquiry needs to be established by the Government to ensure an open, thorough and transparent process is made on this critical element of our future energy requirements, as has been urged by the Welsh Environment Minister. The NFLA are also concerned that, at over 3000 pages long, the statements make it very difficult for the general public to put forward genuine and reasonable concerns.

NFLA Chair, Bailie George Regan comments:

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“It is disappointing that the Government has decided to go ahead with a new generation of nuclear power stations. Renewable energy is an obvious and safer alternative and being developed successfully and to required quantities in Ireland and in Scotland. The NFLA will provide a detailed critique in our response to Government and urge all Councils to do likewise, particularly in challenging the new, undemocratic planning process for new nuclear build.”

Ends

(1) Department of Trade and Industry, Government White Paper on Energy Policy, December 2003: “...nuclear power is not necessary for a secure low-carbon efficient UK economy”.

(2) Hugh Ellis, NFLA England / Wales seminar, Liverpool Town Hall, 9th October 2009, reiterating comments made in a Friends of the Earth Press Release, 1st October 2009.

Further comments:

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