

Nuclear Free Local Authorities **briefing**



Date: 20 October 2000

Subject: **Summary of main points from the NFLA Steering Committee Meeting,
Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, 13 September 2000**

1. BNFL UPDATE

1.1 Storage of highly active wastes

The Secretary updated members on developments affecting storage of highly active wastes at Sellafield. BNFL have now submitted a plan to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate about how it proposed to clear the backlog of highly active wastes by 2015. The NFLA Secretariat had issued a Press Statement challenging BNFL's capacity to achieve the 2015 target date. Questions had also recently arisen about the long-term safety of vitrified highly active wastes and the NFLA Secretariat would report further on this matter.

1.2 Magnox Stations and Reprocessing

The NFLA Legal Adviser would prepare a submission to the Environment Agency on behalf of the Committee in response to the current Magnox Station discharge authorisation consultation. BNFL had also published a timetable for the closure of Magnox stations and the closure of the Magnox reprocessing line at Sellafield. The target date for the closure of the reprocessing line was 2012 but the Legal Adviser expressed little confidence in this date being achieved.

1.3 BNFL Stakeholder Dialogue

The Committee's interests continue to be represented in the Environment Council mediated dialogue between BNFL and its stakeholders by the NFLA Policy Adviser, Mr. Fred Barker. Currently two working groups were developing reports on options for managing the plutonium stockpile at Sellafield and options for managing spent nuclear fuel. Reports from these groups would be submitted to a stakeholder dialogue plenary meeting in November.

1.4 Environment Agency Publication: Response to comments on the scope and methodology for the full re-examination of the Sellafield authorisation for the disposal of radioactive waste

The Legal Adviser had made a submission to this consultation objecting, amongst other matters, to; the exclusion of Irish Republic local authorities from the consultation; the exclusion of the issue of justification from the review; and the delay in commencing the review. The Environment Agency made no concessions on these points but had done so on a number of other matters i.e requiring BNFL to assess alternatives for the management of all its waste streams;

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2. **DOUNREAY: CONSULTATION**

The Legal Adviser explained why the current DTI consultation on spent fuel management options at Dounreay was deficient in a number of respects. Because of defects many councils near the Dounreay plant had called for the current consultation to be scrapped and a new consultation to begin after publication of all relevant data.

Whilst researching the Committee's response to the consultation the Legal Adviser had uncovered documentation which showed the Atomic Energy Authority had originally concluded that storage of spent fuel would be cheaper than reprocessing at the site. However, the published consultation documentation suggested that the costs of storage or reprocessing were comparable.

3. **RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT POLICY**

3.1 **Government Green Paper on Future Policy**

This consultation was now expected in October but could be further delayed. The Committee discussed whether a special meeting should be convened to consider the Green Paper and it was agreed that the Chair in consultation with the Secretary should decide this subject to the Green Paper's content. *Member authorities would be briefed on the paper via the radioactive waste policy briefing series.*

3.2 **Decommissioned Nuclear Powered Submarines**

The Committee had been informed at its last meeting of an informal consultation by the MOD on its plans to bring decommissioned nuclear submarines on land for storage. In view of the timescale involved and the implications of the policy proposal it was decided:

- **that the Secretary ask MOD to establish a formal consultative process which would engage all stakeholders in future decision-making.**

4. **CONTROL OF RADIOACTIVE SCRAP METALS**

The NFLA Chair reported on discussions between the Steering Committee, Steel Action and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation about the publication of a booklet highlighting the future hazards associated with radioactive scrap metals and radioactive sources entering the supply chain of the metals recycling industry. The Chair reported proposals to organise a joint press conference to launch the pamphlet in the House of Commons in November subject to progress.

The Secretary also reported on an IAEA Conference planned for May 2001 in Stockholm which would consider action needed to strengthen controls over radioactive materials and prevent them entering the scrap supply chain. Considering these various matters the Committee decided :

- **to ask Steel Action and ISTC whether they would join NFLAs in a small delegation to the IAEA Stockholm Conference.***

(*subject to the agreement of Government which decides on national representation)

5. **AWE ALDERMASTON**

The Legal Adviser outlined the assistance he had been providing to lawyers seeking a judicial review of the legality of the authorisations for radioactive discharges issued to the Management Consortium for the Aldermaston site last April to assist in the promotion of the Committee's policy. The key issue was the failure by the Environment Agency to adequately justify the discharges from the site which arise from nuclear weapons production.

6. **NUCLEAR TRANSPORTATION AND EMERGENCY PLANNING**

6.1 **Nuclear Materials Transportation**

The Secretary reported briefly on continuing correspondence with a number of local authorities about the safety implications of BNFL's use of a container type 48Y for the transportation of radioactive materials in the North West of England. A French nuclear safety inspectorate report had shown that the 48Y container was likely to rupture in severe accident conditions. The Secretary's investigation of this matter was continuing.

6.2 **Draft Radiation Emergency Planning and Public Information Regulations (REPPIR)**

The Secretary reported correspondence received by the Wales Forum Secretary concerning the implementation of the REPPIR Regulations. The correspondence from the Health and Safety Executive confirmed the intention to divide emergency planning responsibilities, locating all but fixed sites and rail movements outside the REPPIR framework. This raised a question mark over the effectiveness of the implementation of REPPIR and the Legal Adviser reported that these concerns appear well founded since the DETR and HSE had decided that water, road, and air movements should be subject to separate regulations.

(N.B. The NFLA Secretariat was subsequently advised that DETR was expected to consult on transport emergency planning arrangements before the end of the year).

6.3 **Funding Local Authority Emergency Planning**

Uncertainty had emerged over the future funding for local authority emergency planning following a legal challenge by Merseyside FCDA to the Home Office Civil Defence grant distribution criteria. The matter was still being progressed and the NFLA Secretary circulated a note to the meeting which had been provided by the Home Office outlining its position. The Committee recognised the potential implications for emergency planning particularly if future funding was contingent on authorities having to show progress with Civil Defence planning. The Committee considered this would be an extremely retrograde development.

7. **ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT LICENSED NUCLEAR SITES AND SITES AUTHORISED FOR THE DISPOSAL OF NUCLEAR WASTES**

The Legal Adviser provided the Committee with a report on the means by which information could be obtained about licensed nuclear sites and sites authorised for the disposal of nuclear wastes, including landfill.

8. **PROGRESS REPORT**

The Secretary introduced a report which informed the Committee of the various decisions of the 15th Low Level Radiation and Health Conference in Reading between 14 and 16 July 2000; the Chair's attendance at the invitation of organisers at the A and H Bomb Conference in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, between 1 and 9 August 2000; a request by Leeds City Council for NFLA Authorities to consider whether they could assist the Menwith Peace Camp with funding for a new information centre; and a request for co-operation received from the Salzburg Platform Against Nuclear Energy to promote a campaign to end the privileged status of nuclear energy within the European Union.

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