



Date: 12 January 2001

New Briefing 7

Subject: **Summary of main points from the NFLA Steering Committee Meeting, Manchester Town Hall, 15 December 2000**

1. **BNFL update**

1.1 **Magnox Reactors and Reprocessing**

The Secretary reported that BNFL had announced earlier in the year that it planned to close the Magnox reprocessing line (B205) around 2012. In order to achieve this date existing and projected Magnox spent fuel would need to be processed at double the current rate (up from about 500 tonnes per year to 1,000). If BNFL could achieve this then radioactive discharges from Sellafield to the marine environment would also increase rather than reduce as required both by OSPAR and the Government's radioactive waste discharge strategy. The Government's Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee had also called on BNFL to examine the option of spent nuclear fuel storage because it may not be economic to operate the THORP reprocessing line beyond 2010. The RWMAC queried how 'extended' reprocessing at Sellafield could be compliant with Government commitments under OSPAR to reduce radioactive discharges to sea to near zero by 2020.

1.2 **Stakeholder Dialogue**

The Secretary updated on NFLA work within the BNFL 'stakeholder dialogue'. Currently two working groups (on spent fuel management and plutonium management) meet but have yet to report fully. A new sub group of the dialogue to consider the national implications of spent nuclear fuel transportation had been established. The spent fuel management working group commissioned the consultancy, *Environmental Resources Management*, to undertake a socio-economic study of West Cumbria. This study will include a 'visioning' exercise to consider whether the local economy could support new patterns of employment if nuclear reprocessing ended. It was decided: *that the Secretariat prepare a briefing paper for member authorities about progress in the stakeholder dialogue.*

1.3 **Storage of Highly Active Wastes**

The Secretary reported that the Irish Government has repeated its call for the early clearance of liquid highly radioactive wastes at Sellafield and said it was not satisfied with HM Nuclear Installation Inspectorate's (NII) deadline of 2015. It wanted clearance sooner. The Irish call followed publication of a new report on the safety of the containment of liquid wastes. This report echoed many of the concerns already identified by the NFLA Steering Committee. The Secretary would write again to the NII in support of the Irish Government's call for early clearance of these volatile wastes.

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1.4 **EA Technetium-99 Abatement Consultation**

The Secretary reported that the Environment Agency had opened a consultation specifically on Technetium discharges from Sellafield. The EA consultation sought views on a proposal to give BNFL more time to reduce Tc-99 discharges from the current 90Tbq per year limit to 10Tbq by 2006. It was decided: *that the Secretariat prepare a briefing paper to assist member authorities wishing to respond to the consultation.*

2. **Dounreay**

The Secretary reported that the Government's Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee had published a report criticising the poor quality of the consultation information provided by the DTI about options for managing spent nuclear fuel at Dounreay. Many of the Government advisor's remarks underlined earlier views of the NFLA Legal Adviser, Highlands Council, Shetland and Western Isles Island Councils, and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency in responses to the DTI consultation. It was also reported that a recent finding of a radioactive particle on land near Dounreay followed many earlier discoveries of particles on a nearby beach. It was decided:

1. *That the Secretariat urge the DTI to open a new consultation which replaces the existing consultation and addresses the concerns raised by RWMAC, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and local authorities.*

2. *That in view of the continuing discovery of radioactive particles and safety lapses at Dounreay the Secretary urge the DTI to rule out any further reprocessing at the site.*

3. **Radioactive Waste Management Policy**

The Secretary reported that the DETR consultative paper on the long-term management of radioactive wastes was now unlikely to appear before the General Election. The NFLA Secretariat had assisted in the organisation of a Nirex seminar at Manchester Town Hall on 2 December 2000. Nirex said the aim of the day was to identify issues of concern and a number of matters were raised including: the lack of clarity in UK waste policy; the lack of confidence about policy development which might develop if the nuclear industry attempted in parallel to establish a radioactive waste management policy whilst simultaneously seeking to develop new nuclear generating capacity (which would add to the existing waste problem); and the need for Nirex to publish its past list of preferred disposal sites. The Secretary also reported that MoD had responded to the Committee's proposals for a more structured and transparent approach to consultation on policy towards the management of decommissioned submarines. MoD said it was committed to open and thorough consultation. (The first phase of consultation closed at the end of 2000 and the NFLA Secretariat made a submission.)

4. **Control of Radioactive Scrap Metals**

Publication of the NFLA briefing, sponsored by *Steel Action* and the *Iron and Steel Trades Confederation*, was expected in January 2001. A number of other relevant developments were also reported including a letter of support received from the British Metals Federation.

5. **Recycling Radioactively Contaminated Soil**

Shetland Islands' Council drew to the Committee's attention proposals in the United States to recycle contaminated soils from nuclear sites and asked whether the Committee would consider the potential implications of such a policy for the UK and make appropriate representations. It was decided:

That the Secretariat write expressing concern to the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Food Standards Agency and the European Parliament, about the implications for public health and safety of policies and practices which permit the dilution and dispersal of radioactively contaminated soils.

6. **Consultations**

The Secretary informed the Committee of current consultations on matters relevant to the Committee's interests as follows: i) Environment Agency: Discharges of Radioactive Waste to the Environment - Principles for the Assessment of Public Doses; ii) DETR: Statutory Guidance on the Regulation of Radioactive Discharges in the Environment from Nuclear Licensed Sites. It was decided: *that the Secretariat prepare briefings to assist Member authorities wishing to respond.*

7. **Debate on New Nuclear Stations**

The Secretary reported that concern about climate change was leading to new calls for new nuclear construction and a number of examples were provided to the Committee which decided: *that the Secretariat arrange for a briefing to be prepared for circulation to Members which makes the case for meeting our future energy needs without new nuclear generation.*

8. **4th UK & Irish Councils' Meeting on Nuclear Hazards, City Hall, Cork 29 - 30 March 2001**

The Secretary provided an update on arrangements for the above event including an outline programme. The Secretariat planned to mail out information to all local authorities in early January. *All NFLA supporting authorities were urged to register.*

9. **Progress Report**

The Steering Committee was updated on a number of matters as follows:

- 9.1 The challenge to the legality of site radioactive discharge authorisations at AWE Aldermaston (listed for hearing between 11-15 January 2001);
- 9.2 Progress with the implementation of the Radiation Emergency & Public Information Regulations;
- 9.3 The NFLA fringe meeting at the Labour Annual Conference, 26 September 2000;
- 9.4 The Secretary's attendance at a Food Standards Agency consultative exercise on Radiation Dose Assessment at the University of Sussex, Brighton, 3-4 October 2000;
- 9.5 The Secretary's presentation to West Midlands FCDA Seminar: *Radiation - the Hidden Hazard*, Birmingham, 5 October 2000;
- 9.6 The Chair's presentation to the conference against depleted uranium weapons at the Town Hall, Manchester, 4 - 5 November 2000;
- 9.7 The Secretary's attendance at a National Nuclear Corporation (NNC) Seminar on the priorities for the EU 6th Framework Programme on Nuclear R&D at NNC HQ, Knutsford, Cheshire, 21 November 2000;
- 9.8 The 20th Anniversary of Manchester City Council's Nuclear Free Policy, at the Town Hall, Manchester 22 November 2000;
- 9.9 The Secretary's presentation to the LARRMACC Annual Conference: *Radiation - an Ever Present Concern* at the Commonwealth Institute, London, 29 November 2000; and
- 9.10 Progress on the Legal Adviser's participation in a stakeholder dialogue about the *Remediation of Contaminated Land on Licensed Nuclear Sites*.

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