

Nuclear Free Local Authorities briefing



Date: **4 December 2001**

Subject: **Summary of main points from the NFLA Steering Committee Meeting, Glasgow City Chambers, 24 October 2001**

1. NFLA Organisational Review

The NFLA Secretary brought forward a report on progress with the NFLA organizational review. NFLA membership has begun to fall and the Steering Committee has been concerned to reverse this trend. Market research and communications consultants, Media Natura were commissioned to undertake a telephone survey of Council Leaders in non-supporting authorities to identify what they considered to be the current barriers to NFLA membership. This work found:

- Councils know of NFLAs but assume diminished activity because of lower profile.
- Councils are aware of nuclear hazards.
- A minority do not consider NFLAs could be helpful to them. Another minority are very supportive of the NFLA mission. The majority offered qualified support around *local issues*.
- The majority believed civil nuclear issues will become more important in future *but not safer*. Military nuclear issues will also be more significant.
- Councils considered more solutions based work focused on specific local hazards would be more likely to attract support.
- The NFLA image is an issue (most think change would help) but the 'offer' - the NFLA services/product - is a bigger issue (most thought the image was less important than the product).
- If a 'Particular/Local' consultancy approach was offered then councils say they would use it.
- Councils say they would join NFLAs if: an issue is of local public concern; a nuclear emergency raised the profile of issues; or relevant services are offered.
- NFLA affiliation rates are not the obstacle to membership. Councils will pay for services they value.

Media Natura concluded that NFLAs are *addressing the right agenda but asked whether it is being approached appropriately*. Media Natura identified an axis where some of the NFLA work was located at a 'General/Global' level and some at a 'Particular/Local' level. They commented that the trend in local government is towards the Particular/Local and away from the General/Global.

Considering this work and the NFLA Secretary's report, the Steering Committee decided that:

- NFLAs had to locate more of their work in the particular/local arena.
- further questionnaire based market research on NFLA services offered, and how they might be funded in future, should be undertaken.
- a transitional re-organisation of NFLA work be undertaken to separate 'campaigning' work from 'service delivery' work, and that work in each area report to a Sub-Committee of the full Steering Committee, financed through regular NFLA affiliation income, for a further year.

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2. **Nuclear Terrorism**

The NFLA Secretary reported that the attacks in America on 11 September spectacularly illustrated the ability of a few well trained and determined individuals to cause massive material damage and huge loss of life by the careful choice of methods and targets.

The Steering Committee was advised that about 5kgs of weapons grade plutonium, or 13kgs of reactor grade plutonium is required to construct a crude nuclear device with the explosive power of over 100 tonnes of TNT and whilst experts hotly contest the degree of difficulty attached to constructing a crude nuclear device, the potential for such acts has been recognized for many years, most recently by the Prime Minister in Parliament.

The recognition of the potential for such acts, or the simple use of nuclear materials to contaminate vast areas or essential services, e.g. water supplies, has been a factor driving NFLA policy work to: a) prevent a plutonium MOX trade from Britain; b) end the separation of plutonium by nuclear reprocessing; c) end the conversion of uranium to plutonium through the generation of power in nuclear reactors; d) end nuclear material transportation and e) support international nuclear non proliferation initiatives.

Nuclear power stations and waste management facilities - particularly at Sellafield and La Hague in France – were also recognized as 'high value' terrorist targets and the Steering Committee decided that the NFLA Secretariat should: *1) bring forward a costed research proposal to investigate the potential consequences of terrorism at nuclear sites in the UK. 2) review current NFLA radioactive waste management policy and bring forward a paper to the next Steering Committee for consideration.*

3. **Energy Review**

The NFLA Secretary reported that the Government's Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) was undertaking a review of the security and diversity of energy supply and was expected to report around the end of the year. In response the NFLA Secretariat had issued two *New Nuclear Monitor* briefing papers in July and September and would continue the series of briefing into the new year.

The NFLA Policy Adviser and Secretary have met with the Chief Executive of the Environment Council (which presently manages the BNFL 'stakeholder dialogue') to seek his support for the consultative processes proposed in the second NFLA *New Nuclear Monitor* Briefing. Both *New Nuclear Monitor* Briefings were submitted to the Cabinet Office led Energy Review for consideration.

The NFLA Secretariat was consulting Parliamentarians in both Houses and from different Parties to explore the potential for a Parliamentary coalition to promote the case for renewables and energy conservation for future diversity and security of energy supply. Similar early consultations were in hand at a local government level in England and Wales to consolidate and promote existing Local Government Association energy policy.

4. **Radioactive Waste Management Policy**

The NFLA Secretary reported that the Government had finally opened the first stage of its consultation on the future management of radioactive waste. A draft briefing to local authorities about the consultation documentation was approved by the Steering Committee for circulation.

The Legal Adviser attended the first Workshop for the EU COWAM (Communities & Radioactive Waste) Project in Oskarshamn, Sweden in September. Workshop organisers paid the Legal Adviser's expenses. The purpose of COWAM is to identify from European experience ways of carrying public support in nuclear waste policy decision making.

It was reported that in correspondence with Nirex and at other relevant fora the NFLA Secretariat continued to press for publication of the previous long and short list of UK sites considered suitable for radioactive waste disposal. Nirex say they have raised the Committee's concerns with the DETR (as it was) and DEFRA (as it now is). Nirex say they understand the Committee's point that public confidence in any radioactive waste management consultative process is bound to be affected when significant information about sites formerly considered for investigation continues to be withheld.

The first stage of the Navy's ISOLUS project, to identify an acceptable interim land based storage policy for decommissioned nuclear submarines, was complete. The NFLA Secretary had served on the project steering group. A report has been completed by ISOLUS consultants at Lancaster University and this will be used to draft guidance to contractors designing future interim land storage for decommissioned nuclear submarines. One proposal arising from ISOLUS, and accepted by MoD, was that the Ministry should write to all local authorities at an early date to inform Councils, particularly in areas which might expect to be affected, of the work now in hand.

The NFLA Legal Adviser reported on progress with the BNFL Magnox nuclear station decommissioning strategy dialogue facilitated by the Environment Council. To date the dialogue had agreed that: (a) it is technically feasible to decommission at any time; (b) the undiscounted cost is remarkably similar regardless of when dismantling takes place; and (c) if radiation occupational standards remained the same, workers must be provided individually with the same standard of safety whenever decommissioning occurs as a result of the law. The dialogue is likely to continue for another six months.

5. **BNFL Update**

The Legal Adviser reported that in September the Government granted the permission necessary to enable the plutonium fuel Sellafield MOX Plant (SMP) to start up. The Government stated that it was satisfied that the plant was 'justified' under European law i.e the plant would produce sufficient benefits to offset its radiation detriments. In arriving at this decision, it relied on the view of independent consultants that the plant would make £150 millions over its life-time. However the plant cost £472 millions and these costs were *entirely ignored* in arriving at this conclusion. Opponents of the plant including the NFLA Steering Committee argued this was wrong and Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth had commenced joint legal proceedings arguing that the decision is unlawful because of this failure.

Additionally the Irish Government had started legal action in the European Court of Justice on the same point and continues to seek arbitration on the matter under the OSPAR Convention on marine pollution which both the UK and Ireland are parties to.

The Steering Committee was advised that the Environment Agency for England and Wales had begun a new consultation on a proposal for a new authorisation to control liquid and gaseous discharges from Sellafield. The agency is proposing a reduction in discharges for 22 radionuclides - but is also accepting that increases in some discharges may be necessary for decommissioning of existing facilities or dealing with existing waste on the site. The agency says its proposed changes would result in a reduction of radioactive dose to the public of 27 per cent for liquid discharges and 21 per cent for aerial discharges.

The Agency states that the UK is committed under the OSPAR agreement to reducing total sea discharges to under 30TBq (excluding tritium) by 2020. The new proposals would reduce sea discharges for beta radionuclides from 400TBq a year to 220TBq and is considering applying further cuts of five per cent a year.

The Environment Agency for England and Wales has decided not to recommend tightening technetium-99 discharge regulation for Sellafield following a public consultation process.

6. Emergency Planning

The NFLA Steering Committee approved for submission a draft note prepared in response to the current Cabinet Office consultation about emergency planning in England and Wales. The note welcomed most Cabinet Office proposals but opposed proposals to conflate peacetime and wartime emergency planning legislation.

The Legal Adviser prepared a note for the Steering Committee's information on the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness & Public Information) Regulations 2001. It was decided that the Legal Adviser's commentary on the new legislation be circulated to member authorities for their information.

7. UK-Irish Conference on Nuclear Hazards, Tenby, Pembrokeshire 21-22 March 2002

The NFLA Steering Committee welcomed the invitation from Pembrokeshire County Council to host the 4th joint UK/Irish Conference. Tenby is being explored having good road and rail links and being a coastal resort noted for its outstanding natural beauty. The Committee decided to develop the conference programme around a nuclear emergency planning theme. Pembrokeshire Council is also interested to include a visit to Trecwn where owners of a former Navy munitions facility continue to offer site tunnels for radioactive waste storage.

8. Progress Report

The Secretary and Legal Adviser briefly report on several different areas of NFLA policy work including: developments at Dounreay; depleted uranium hazards; Trawsfynydd decommissioning; and implications for the UK of developments in missile defence.

9. **Date of next meeting:** 11.00am 11January 2002 Town Hall, Manchester
For more information on the above matters contact: **Stewart Kemp** 0161 234 324