

Nuclear Free Local Authorities briefing



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Introduction

The NFLA Annual Conference was replaced in 2002 with a half day *Annual Policy Briefing* designed to bring a sharper focus to NFLA policy discussion. The new format was well received by some 50 delegates from about 30 local authorities across the UK. Proceedings were also clearly enhanced by the quality of speakers and the clarity of their presentations. The highlight of the programme was the address by the Environment Minister, the Rt Hon **Michael Meacher** MP. His presentation is copied below together with key points from the other speakers: **Fred Barker**, Policy Adviser to NFLAs and a member of the Government's Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee; **Stephen Spivey**, DTI team working on the creation of a new public body to take charge of, and manage the clean up of, nuclear sites currently owned by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd (BNFL) and the UK Atomic Energy Authority; and **David Bonser**, the BNFL Director leading preparations for the transfer of Company assets to the new body – the Liabilities Management Authority. The meeting opened with a welcome by the Mayor of Slough, Cllr **Satpal Singh Parma** and an introduction by the NFLA Chair, Cllr **Ken Wyatt** JP, Rotherham MBC.



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MANAGING THE RADIOACTIVE WASTE LEGACY: THE NEXT STEPS

Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP

“Thank you for inviting me to today’s annual briefing. I am delighted to be here, and welcome the opportunity to speak to you about what we in Government have been doing in trying to find a solution to the very important issue of radioactive waste management. It is an issue that we are working hard to find solutions to, and we are only too aware that there is no excuse for delay. We simply have to face this problem head on – it won’t go away if we ignore it

But we need your input, and I hope that me coming here today will show you that we are serious about finding a solution, that we do value your views and concerns, we do listen to criticism and that we are not going to go off and make decisions behind closed doors. That simply won’t work.

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So what have we done? You will remember that in September 2001 we published a joint consultation paper with the devolved administrations - “ *Managing radioactive waste safely*”. This set out our proposed programme for deciding how to manage solid radioactive waste for the next several thousand years. We circulated the paper to a very wide audience and invited views over a six month period until March 2002. After analysing the responses, we announced in July what we were going to do next . I would like to now talk about what we proposed, what people's views were, what we're doing as a result, and what we hope to achieve over the next few years.

We had to first explain the problem facing us – that over 10,000 tonnes of solid radioactive waste are currently safely stored in the UK. But we also made clear that this stockpile would continue to grow and would reach 500,000 tonnes over the next century. Clearly, we must decide the best way to manage this waste safely. Some said that the safest way of doing so is in an underground repository – indeed, this method is one that some other countries already plan to use. Others said that there were too many uncertainties, and that we need long-term stores at nuclear sites to last until we know better how to manage it. But there are other options too. Whilst taking account of developments in other countries, in the European Union and elsewhere, we must adopt a strategy that draws on our own experience, works best for us, has broad support and is practicable.

We therefore proposed :

- to review all the options,
- to draw up criteria against which each option would be assessed,
- to mount a programme of public debate and information gathering,
- to set up a new independent body to advise what information is needed and when we would have enough to decide,
- to reach a decision around 2006, then to invite views on how to implement it - for example, how to identify any sites that might be needed for a new facility,
- to start implementing the strategy around 2007.

Our proposals stimulated debate on the issues at hand, and we received a wide range of views. We published a detailed summary on 29 July which was sent out to all respondents and those who expressed an interest, including NFLA. Here are some highlights:

- Most respondents accepted that we should review the different options for managing the waste, so we could decide the best long-term solution.
- Many said go as fast, or faster than we proposed. Others said we should avoid fixed deadlines, establishing common ground at each stage before moving on.
- Of those who commented on our proposal to set up a new body, most agreed, including the Nuclear Free Local Authorities. Most said the new body, and not the Government, should manage the review. But opinions varied on what else it should do, for example whether just take on the review, or other functions too.
- There was some criticism of our proposals, and concerns raised on issues that could influence our work programme. For example, the Nuclear Free Local Authorities expressed particular concern about the Government's proposals for streamlining the planning system, where major infrastructure projects would go through a new Parliamentary procedure. Indeed, there were others too, that shared your view that these new proposals would limit the scope for debate, especially at local level, which could be a significant loss in the search for a strategy that inspires broad support and confidence.

Having analysed people's views and suggestions we decided with our Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish colleagues how we should continue to the next stage of the process. Margaret Beckett announced on 29th July that:

- We would press ahead with a review of all waste management options.

- We would appoint an independent body to oversee the review process which would make recommendations on the option, or combination of options for managing waste which would achieve long-term protection for people and environment.
- We would advertise widely for members of the new body, and would seek people with technical expertise, as well as those with a wider perspective of environmental, health, social or ethical issues. The body **must** win public confidence and operate in an open and inclusive manner, with the review process engaging with both stakeholders and the wider public.
- We explained that the Government would take the ultimate decision on what option, or combination of options to adopt. We set out the proposed stages of the review and the timescale for reaching decisions by 2006. But there were no rigid deadlines, though, and we would proceed more quickly if we could.
- We would consider the implications of more plutonium and spent fuel being treated as a waste and would consider some site-related issues which could affect the choice of option, such as the question of community vetoes, volunteerism, and incentives.
- In a separate announcement, the Government announced that it had decided not to go ahead with the new Parliamentary planning procedure, although it was still looking for ways to streamline the process.

But those were not the only issues that were covered in our paper. We wanted to know, for example, what people thought about waste substitution, decommissioning and regulation of waste. I know that the Nuclear Free Local Authorities opposed extending waste substitution at this stage, and there were many other concerns raised during the consultation. We are now considering how we should act on these issues, and we shall make further announcements later.

So what do we want to achieve over the next few years? We want to develop a long-term waste management strategy that inspires public trust. The secretive approach of "decide, announce, defend" does not work. That is why we need a new, independent body, and to involve people with new faces and different perspectives in the process. But the new body alone is not enough – the whole process must be seen by stakeholders and public as involving them and addressing their concerns. That's why we must replace the process of occasional consultations by a more dynamic process of engagement.

We need to engage with many different organisations with different perspectives and experiences. There is a vital role for local government - informing and engaging people in decision making, promoting the economic and social development of their area, taking or engaging in planning decisions, protecting their local environment, and other relevant functions. Alongside the involvement of individual authorities, we must encourage organisations like the Nuclear Free Local Authorities and the local government associations to play their role.

We are serious about achieving results. We want this process to be a success. We are striving to implement a strategy that gives long-term protection to people and the environment, and which can be implemented because people have confidence both in the decision and in the process by which it is reached. We are continuing to work towards achieving our goal, and will continue to tell you our plans as soon as we can. Our next step will be to appoint the new body, and we will announce more detailed plans on this, and other related issues, over the next few months.

The success of our programme clearly rests on sharing views and opinions, experiences and expertise, and listening to and valuing what others have to say. We welcome your contribution, and I do hope that you continue to be involved."

Engaging Stakeholders and Building Confidence

Fred Barker

This presentation brought definition to the process of 'stakeholder engagement' asking: Who are the stakeholders? What are the types of engagement? What are the techniques? Are there good examples? Does it build confidence?

Stakeholders were identified as: Government departments; the nuclear industry; the regulators; local authorities; environmental groups; and the public. The types of engagement techniques included: focus groups; citizens' panels; consensus conferences; stakeholder workshops; and sustained stakeholder dialogue.

Recent good examples of stakeholder engagement on nuclear policy issues, using different techniques, were identified as: MoD's ISOLUS consultation of future policy for the storage of decommissioned nuclear submarines; the PASCALEA process to clarify Atomic Weapons Establishment environmental aims; DTI's approach to consultation with environmental groups about the creation of a Liabilities Management Authority; BNFL's stakeholder dialogue to inform its environmental policy; and the process set up by DEFRA and devolved administrations to develop policy for future radioactive waste management (as summarised above by Michael Meacher).

Fred Barker concluded by saying these different consultative approaches are not perfect, and can generate cynicism, but as experience is gained, practice is improved, and compared with the old 'decide-announce-defend' approach to policy, considerable progress is being made.

Managing the Nuclear Legacy – A Strategy for Action

Stephen Spivey

This presentation explained the work of DTI in drafting legislation and consulting on institutional arrangements for a new 'non departmental public body' – a Liabilities Management Authority (LMA) – to take charge of BNFL, and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, sites in England, Scotland and Wales.

The presentation set out: the scale and diversity of the task; the timescales involved; the need for high quality technical and managerial skills; the current lack of strategic control and direction; rising costs (current estimated at £48 billion); and the lack of public confidence.

The LMA would bring a new focus and strategic leadership to nuclear clean up with the sole aim: "To ensure that the nuclear legacy is cleaned up **safely, securely, cost effectively** and in ways which protect the environment for the benefit of current and future generations"

Competition was at the heart of the LMA proposals and the LMA will contract with site licensee companies, initially BNFL plc, Magnox Electric and UKAEA. Other site licensee companies may be created.

Stephen Spivey said the key message of the Government's White Paper was that it was getting to grips with the nuclear legacy and that openness and transparency within a robust regulatory framework is essential to command public confidence.

Openness and transparency was described as 'fundamental' – the LMA will be a "champion of public information". This will be underpinned by a statutory obligation on the LMA to consult widely and publish information.

The presentation concluded with an invitation to delegates to submit their views to DTI on how the nuclear waste legacy should be managed and how to continue to build public confidence.

Delivering Safe Liabilities Management and Waste Clean Up

David Bonser, Director BNFL ALFA

This presentation stressed that many of BNFL's liabilities were inherited and pre-date the creation of BNFL in 1971. Now BNFL is an international business. "Our focus is on serving our two main customer groups: global nuclear utilities and governments. Today, we operate in 16 countries and employ more than 23,000 people. In 2001/02 our turnover was £2,261m."

The presentation was illustrated with a number of graphic 'before' and 'after' slides from Sellafield to demonstrate BNFL's skills and a new determination to bring the site up to modern standards. The strategic focus now is on waste clean up.

However, there was a warning: "The regulatory processes we deploy for long term waste management must be driven by pragmatism and sound judgement rather than striving for utopia. Regulation needs to be based on common principles, preferably that of pragmatic application of Tolerability of Risk rather than that of a progressive and substantial reduction in (radioactive discharge and exposure) limits."

For more information on any of the above matters contact: Stewart Kemp 0161 234 3244 or email: office@nuclearpolicy.info