



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 21st January 2013

Development of a deep underground radioactive waste repository – Cumbria’s decision should be for further postponement or to say ‘no’

On the 30th January three Cumbrian Councils – Cumbria County Council, Copeland Borough Council and Allerdale District Council – will be deciding if they should plan to go forward to the next stage of potentially hosting a deep-underground radioactive waste repository. This follows a three month postponement of the decision for further internal discussion and talks with the UK Government (1).

The three Councils established the ‘West Cumbria Managing Radioactive Waste Safely’ (MRWS) Partnership to consider if it should formally express an interest in hosting such a repository, as part of the Government’s ‘volunteerism’ process. No other Councils in the UK have taken up this request.

In its response to the MRWS consultation, the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) gave its policy view as to whether the three Cumbrian Councils should go forward with the next stage, which would begin to formalise the expression of interest and start a process of investigating potential suitable sites (2).

The key parts of the NFLA response were:

- The NFLA does not believe the areas covered by Allerdale and/or Copeland Borough Councils should take part in the search for a potential location for a nuclear waste repository.
- The NFLA view is that it will be impossible to demonstrate with any scientific credibility that the resultant radiation dose to people from a nuclear waste repository would be at an acceptably low level into the far distant future.
- More research is required on uncertainties associated with deep geological “disposal” as well as robust interim storage before proceeding to a site selection process.
- If voluntarism is to mean anything, local communities must be given the right to withdraw from the process at any time up to the start of construction. Local Authorities must not be allowed to override local wishes.
- The NFLA agrees with the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) that a new nuclear programme raises different political and ethical issues when compared with the consideration of legacy wastes. CoRWM said new wastes should be subject to a separate public assessment process. By going ahead to the next stage of the process before the generation of new wastes has been given adequate consideration Cumbrian authorities will be being complicit in depriving other authorities (for example those on waste transport routes) of a proper say on the future of UK energy policy.
- The NFLA view is that there should be a national debate about what constitutes suitable geology and how to find it before Cumbrian authorities proceed to the next stage. We should not allow the voluntarist approach to override the idea of finding the safest possible method to manage these dangerous wastes.
- The Partnership should have made clear in the consultation materials that, in the event of a 16GW new build programme around half of the waste, by volume, destined for the repository is *not* yet located in Cumbria.
- Given that the Government has agreed with the Partnership’s third Inventory Principle to inform a Community Siting Partnership at the earliest opportunity when significant changes occur to the ‘upper’ inventory, the Partnership should have pressed the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to produce an upper inventory which looked at a 16GW new nuclear programme.

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- DECC has said it will discuss emplacing spent fuel from new nuclear reactors in the repository with the host community if the process proceeds – implying that the community would have the option of deciding only to accept legacy wastes. The Partnership needs to ask DECC now what the implications would be if the host community said it would only take legacy waste. The Partnership also needs to ask DECC to address the issue of the probability that the risk limit for a single repository being exceeded in the event of inclusion of waste from new reactors.
- It is the NFLA view that, should the Cumbrian authorities move on to the next stage, the momentum in the process will be too great to allow withdrawal in future. Cumbria could, therefore end up not only with a disposal facility which takes all the spent fuel from new reactors, but also with more than one dump.

This remains the NFLA view and therefore it hopes the three Cumbrian Councils either postpone the decision again for further technical considerations or formally decide not to move ahead with the next stage of the process. The NFLA further notes the reported view of the MRWS geological advisor, Dr Jeremy Dearlove, that the two most likely sites in Cumbria, at Ennerdale in West Cumbria and at Eskdale / Silloth in North Cumbria, have a 'low possibility' of containing suitable geology for a deep-waste repository (3). It also notes the growing concerns being raised by the Lake District National Park. (4)

NFLA Chair, Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"I welcomed the November decision of the councillors of west Cumbria to seek more time to deliberate on whether to participate further on hosting a deep underground radioactive waste repository, though I believe three months is an insufficient time to consider all the complexities of this technical issue. It is the firm view of the NFLA that there remain too many scientific and technical uncertainties to go ahead with this process at the current time. I support the voluntarist process but believe the Government have put the cart before the horses – an agreed and robust case should be developed first over how high and medium level radioactive waste is managed and stored, including a full geological screening of the United Kingdom. At present the Cumbrian Councils could be making a decision that future generations may come to regret. I hope the Councils either postpone the decision for now or, if they take a decision, to say no to going ahead with this mammoth project."

Ends

Further information - Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary - 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930186.

Notes to editors:

- (1) West Cumbria Managing Radioactive Waste Safely Partnership, 'Cumbrian councils say more work needed with Government before proceeding with nuclear waste decision', 10th November 2012, http://www.westcumbriamrws.org.uk/news_more.asp?newsid=49
- (2) NFLA Radioactive Waste Briefing 33 – Siting an Underground Radioactive Waste Repository, March 2012, http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/radwaste/NFLA_RWB_32_West_Cumbria_MRWS_consultation.pdf
- (3) Say No to Burying Nuclear Waste in the Lake District, 'Report of Public Meeting in Keswick', 16th January 2013, <http://www.nolakesnukedump.com/>
- (4) The Guardian, 'Protest spread on Cumbria nuclear waste dump', 17th January 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/the-northerner/2013/jan/17/ennerdale-nuclear-waste>

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