



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 7th March 2013

NFLA submit response to FSA consultation on monitoring radioactivity in food – monitoring regime needs major improvements

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) has submitted a detailed and thorough response to the Food Standards Agency in response to its consultation seeking comments on proposed changes with the regime to monitor radioactivity levels in foodstuffs (1).

The NFLA response (2) was developed for it by independent marine pollution consultant Tim Deere-Jones (3) and follows on from a number of similar comments of concern made by the NFLA to the Environment Agency over draft environmental permits for a new nuclear reactor at Hinkley Point (4).

The Food Standards Agency Press release of 12 December states that “An annual monitoring programme has been in place for more than 25 years and no food safety risks have been identified during this period”. The FSA was asking stakeholders to submit their views on plans to update and improve the existing monitoring programme. The closing date for submissions was 6th March 2013.

Key points made in the NFLA submission include:

- NFLA concludes that the current programme for monitoring doses of marine derived radioactivity in food is not fit for purpose, in that it can not provide sufficient data to justify the FSA claim that there is a “low risk from radioactivity in food”.
- The NFLA does not believe that the FSA proposal to “optimise” the monitoring programme by “reducing background monitoring away from nuclear sites” while continuing to monitor food around all licensed nuclear sites”, would offer the best or most effective programme for monitoring marine radioactivity in foodstuffs.
- On the contrary, the NFLA believe that the FSA preferred option is not a viable proposal for monitoring in the context of the current poor data and the large proposed future expansion of nuclear power, and radioactive waste discharges to sea, in the UK.
- The NFLA urges the FSA to adopt a more stringent and intense monitoring programme, which must consist of:
 - a higher number of sampling observations;
 - analysis for a greater number of representative isotopes;
 - a more intensive study of “far field” sites (such as island and coastal communities);
 - a more intensive link between sample gathering and the “peaks” of pulsed discharges (especially in the case of Tritium);
 - a more intense research effort into the potential dietary impacts of the sea to land transfer of a range of radio-nuclides and the contribution of marine radioactivity to coastal zone terrestrial diets;
 - a more intense research effort into the dietary implications of Americium “in growth” (due to Plutonium 241 decay).

NFLA Chair, Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“The NFLA believes the FSA’s preferred new monitoring programme for checking radioactivity levels in foodstuffs could reduce rather than improve the food safety regime. Our detailed submission to the FSA argues for a much greater level of sampling for radioactivity in order to improve food safety and public confidence. Given the recent lack of public confidence in food safety measures I implore the FSA to carefully consider the NFLA’s response and seek to improve its monitoring regime.”

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Report author, Tim Deere-Jones said:

“The Food Standard Agency proposes to “improve” the existing monitoring programme by reducing the amount of monitoring work it undertakes. The NFLA have reviewed the proposal and carried out a critical analysis of the existing FSA programme. This has concluded that it is flawed and unfit for purpose and cannot provide an accurate assessment of dietary doses of sea borne radioactivity.

Doses are received through consumption of sea foods, and also terrestrial foodstuffs grown in the coastal zone and contaminated by sea borne radioactivity transferred to the land in marine aerosols and sea spray by onshore winds, and by storm surges and tidal inundations. The only way to develop an accurate assessment of dietary doses from sea borne radioactivity is to increase the level of monitoring and to conduct more detailed research.

The FSA proposal to reduce the effort would be a major mistake, doubly so in the current climate where other food scandals are shown to have been caused largely by a failure to properly resource the research and monitoring effort”

Ends

Further information - Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary - 0161 234 3244 or 07771 930186.
Tim Deere-Jones – 01834 871011.

Notes to editors:

- (1) Food Standard Agency, ‘Consultation on Radioactivity in Food’, December 2012
<http://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/consultations/consultations-england/2012/radioactivity-consult>.
- (2) The NFLA Radioactive Waste Briefing which contains this submission response is attached with this media release.
- (3) Tim Deere-Jones is an independent marine pollution consultant who lives in Pembrokeshire. He has worked previously for Greenpeace International, Friends of the Earth, Marinert and the World Wildlife Fund. He has produced a number of reports and given presentations at NFLA events. He is a member of the Nuclear Consulting Group.
- (4) Nuclear Free Local Authorities, NFLA New Nuclear Monitor 29, ‘Joint response to Environment Agency consultation on draft environmental permits for a new nuclear reactor at Hinkley Point, Somerset, November 2012
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/nuclearmonitor/NFLA_New_Nuclear_Monitor_29.pdf

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