



*Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee*

# information

**NFLA media release - for immediate release, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

## **Radioactive waste management consultation – why is DECC repeating again the mistakes of the past?**

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the UK Government's latest attempt to find a long-term solution for the management of high and intermediate level radioactive waste. However, it believes the Government is continuing to make the bad mistakes of the past and has not improved what remains a deeply flawed policy.

The 12 week consultation by the Department of Energy and Climate Change's (DECC) 'Managing Radioactive Waste Safely' (MRWS) process (1) reiterates many points from its previous attempt to find a solution to this policy, which was rejected earlier this year by Cumbria County Council (2). These include a continued commitment to constructing a 'geological disposal facility' (GDF) whilst not looking in detail at alternative storage solutions, a commitment to voluntarism but a dilution of the 'two tier' Council support for site selection, and a reaffirmation of the economic benefits of a geological disposal facility whilst ignoring many of the disadvantages that brought about Cumbria County Council's earlier negative decision.

In its response to DECC's 'call for evidence' which has led up to this new consultation, the NFLA made many important points, which will be reiterated in this consultation (3). These include:

- An exercise to ensure that the definition of 'community' in the context of radioactive waste disposal is robust and can stand scrutiny needs to take place.
- There should be an aim to identify the issues pertaining to 'potentially affected communities' such as, for example, radiological risk; impact on house prices; economic benefits etc.
- Any new process offering options to be presented to volunteer communities needs to demonstrate that at every key decision point the 'community' is still in support of the process.
- The establishment of robust ground rules on community benefit packages.
- A continued concern around the technical and scientific robustness of 'geological disposal' and the need to more robustly consider interim storage alternatives. NFLA has consistently argued that there is an urgent need for the MRWS process to consider the "retrievability" issue in relation to a deep-underground repository.
- A review of the former MRWS process and which aspects were positive and should be retained; such as the staged process, the right to withdraw, partnership, voluntarism and participation etc.
- A full consideration of the security issues around the storage of high and intermediate level radioactive active waste, both in existing facilities and in any new facilities that will be developed in the future.

In its initial consideration of this new consultation, the NFLA welcomes some parts of it, such as the provision of more information to be given to local communities early on in the process, an ongoing right to withdraw from the process at any stage and commitments to improve the opportunity for local people to have their views made known.

However, the NFLA is disappointed with DECC's rehashing of key concepts around 'geological disposal'. It is also very concerned to see that 'voluntarism' has been subtly changed to allow, for example, potential support by Copeland and Allerdale Councils to be sufficient without the need to get the full support of the Waste Planning Authority, in this case Cumbria County Council.

NFLA supports the robust cross-party response of the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative Group Leaders of Cumbria County Council on this proposed change (4). Cumbria County Council

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES**



*Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee*

# information

Leader Stuart Young was quoted as saying: "We are very concerned that we as the waste and strategic planning authority have no real say in the final decision on a GDF. It looks like the government did not like the [negative] result of the last vote and has moved to exclude us from future decisions."

Former Conservative Leader of Cumbria County Council Eddie Martin went further by calling this proposed change "astonishingly undemocratic". He went on to say: "David Cameron talks about the big society and localism but abandons them when they do not suit him. (Cumbria County Council's decision)...was a decision taken after much thought, hundreds of hours of work and visits to Canada and Sweden." (5)

NFLA also has some sympathy with the view of the GMB union that radioactive waste interim stores at Sellafield need to be more adequately and safely managed, given that the bulk of waste is currently on this site. However, it disagrees with its view over placing a GDF at Sellafield as a long-term solution, as it is likely to fail a geological survey for a deep underground repository. (6) Geological unsuitability was one of the key determinants of Cumbria County Council's decision not to go forward with the MRWS process.

NFLA also note that the majority of parish councils in Copeland and Allerdale formally opposed going ahead with the MRWS in their area, at variance with the two Council's formal decisions. (7)

Councillor Mark Hackett, Chair of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) said:

"NFLA is concerned that this DECC consultation replays many of the ineffective decisions of previous unsuccessful consultations. We share the concerns of Cumbria County Council around the democratic decision-making of this new policy process and the diminution of the role of County Councils in the MRWS process as a whole. We remain highly concerned over the wider safety issues, potential environmental damage and deep technical and scientific uncertainties with constructing a GDF and we will again consistently outline such views in this consultation. It is time to stop repeating the mistakes of the past and rather improve on existing interim storage solutions of the waste, much of which is contained at Sellafield."

Ends

For more information please contact:

Sean Morris on 00 44 (0)7771 930196 or 00 44 (0)161 234 3244.

Notes for editors:

- (1) DECC Media Release, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-consulted-on-radioactive-waste-disposal-site>
- (2) BBC Online, 30<sup>th</sup> January <http://bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-21253673>
- (3) NFLA Radioactive Waste Briefing 39, June 2013  
[http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/radwaste/NFLA\\_RWB\\_39\\_MRWS\\_lessons\\_learned.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/radwaste/NFLA_RWB_39_MRWS_lessons_learned.pdf)
- (4) Cumbria County Council 12th Sept 2013  
[http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/news/2013/September/12\\_09\\_2013-122451.asp](http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/news/2013/September/12_09_2013-122451.asp)
- (5) Guardian, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013  
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/sep/12/county-councils-nuclear-waste-dump-sites>
- (6) GMB Media Release, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013  
<http://www.gmb.org.uk/newsroom/nuclear-strategy-needed-for-sellafield>
- (7) Radiation Free Lakeland Media Release, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013  
<http://mariannewildart.wordpress.com/2013/09/12/who-says-democracy-is-dead-decc/>

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES**