



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 9th April 2015

As the Sellafield THORP plant reaches its 21st birthday, NFLA calls on the Government and the nuclear industry to reflect on expensive past mistakes for future nuclear policy

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) notes today that the Sellafield Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant – or THORP – shortly reaches its 21st birthday. The THORP facility is a salutary exercise in some of the failings of the UK nuclear industry and of the over-ambitious claims that continue to be made about nuclear power.

As an excellent briefing by the Climate News Network (1) and CORE Cumbria (2) notes, THORP cost £2.85 billion to build and in its first 10 years it planned to reprocess 7,000 tonnes of spent fuel with a £500 million profit. However, a regular spate of technical faults meant THORP failed to meet these targets, and after a decade only 5,045 tonnes has been reprocessed. The plant's real profits or losses have never been disclosed by the Government or the nuclear industry. THORP is due to close in 2018.

Despite some of these failings, the UK Government then commissioned the Sellafield Mixed Oxide Fuel – or MOX – plant to turn the plutonium and uranium produced from THORP into new fuel, sold back to overseas customers in an example of nuclear recycling. Due to produce 120 tonnes of MOX fuel, it has produced just 13 tonnes of fuel in ten years, at an original cost of £280 million. After the Fukushima accident it was decided to close the plant due to a perceived lack of orders. The total loss to the British taxpayer for this failure was later admitted to be £2.2 billion.

As a result of these decisions, the UK now has the world's largest stockpile of used plutonium (just over 100 tonnes) and around 7,000 tonnes of uranium, for which there is currently no use and which has to remain under a daily armed guard over concerns of a terrorist attack.

NFLA notes these figures given ongoing attempts to create other large-scale nuclear projects like:

- A new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point in Somerset, with others being considered for Sizewell, Sellafield Moorside and Wylfa. The costs for a new nuclear reactor are conservatively put at £14 billion each, with the Government and nuclear industry struggling to find investors for it and serious legal challenges from the Government of Austria and renewable energy companies.
- UK Government policy is to develop a new plant at Sellafield to reprocess the plutonium stockpile. First discussed over six years ago, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority is still considering several 'credible options'.
- The Government is still seeking, after over a decade's consideration, for a volunteer site to host a deep underground radioactive waste repository. One of the last decisions of the last Government, with minimum discussion by Parliament, was to place this project under the national infrastructure planning system, thus reducing and diluting the role of local government or local communities to challenge it if unhappy with a proposed site. (3)
- The UK Government and the nuclear industry are promoting the development of small modular nuclear reactors. A detailed NFLA study of them shows a complete lack of a robust supply chain for them, as well as serious economic, security, safety and proliferation concerns around such technology. (4)

NFLA urges the next UK Government, and the Republic of Ireland Government in its consideration of small modular nuclear reactors; to undertake an immediate review of nuclear policy in the light of previous failings and with the potential for large amounts of public money being used for such new nuclear developments. NFLA believe energy policy needs to be directed towards the development of a

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wide renewable energy mix, to assist local government in developing energy efficiency programmes and decentralised energy service companies; and to the promotion of community energy co-operatives.

NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“The 21st birthday of the Sellafield THORP plant is an appropriate time to consider the failings of the nuclear reprocessing industry, at great financial cost to the hard pressed taxpayer. The NFLA consistently raised concerns that these plants would turn out to be nuclear white elephants and we were absolutely correct in our analysis. I call on the next UK Energy Minister and politicians of all parties to reflect on these mistakes and direct future energy policy towards an ongoing renewable energy revolution.”

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For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244 or Pete Roche, NFLA Scotland Policy Advisor on 0131 444 1445.

Notes for editors:

- (1) Climate News Network, ‘Unhappy 21st birthday for UK’s nuclear white elephants’, 8th April
<http://www.climatenewsnetwork.net/unhappy-21st-birthday-for-uks-nuclear-white-elephants/>
- (2) CORE Cumbria briefing on Thorp, 8th April
<http://www.no2nuclearpower.org.uk/recent-additions/thorp-21-today-but-no-key-to-waste-crisis/>
- (3) The Guardian, April 5 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/apr/05/law-changed-so-nuclear-waste-dumps-can-be-forced-on-local-communities>
- (4) NFLA New Nuclear Monitor 37, Small Modular Nuclear Reactors, March 2015
http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/NFLA_New_Nuclear_Monitor_No37.pdf

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