



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

# information

**NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

**NFLA comments on overseas origin nuclear fuel stored in the UK and the operation of the Sellafield Thorp plant – stop reprocessing now!**

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) publishes today its model response for member local authorities to respond to the UK Government's consultation on the management of overseas origin nuclear fuel held in the UK, much of which the Government argues cannot be dealt with by the Sellafield THORP (Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant) reprocessing facility. (1)

The consultation has been developed by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). The proposals would allow the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) to manage by means of interim storage and disposal small quantities of overseas origin oxide fuels that are either not economic to reprocess or cannot be reprocessed in THORP before it closes in 2018.

DECC argues in the consultation that, if it allows the NDA the option of not reprocessing remaining overseas fuel, it will then be able to choose whether to place the fuels in interim storage or to go ahead with reprocessing as planned.

***The NFLA view is that the NDA should not have the option to continue reprocessing and that THORP should be closed as soon as is practicable.***

If DECC can sanction "virtual reprocessing" for 30 tonnes of residual spent so that THORP can shut in 2018, it begs the question why cannot the same be done **now** for the remaining 300 tonnes of overseas fuel and any remaining AGR spent fuel which is still slated for reprocessing, so that THORP can be shut down at the earliest practicable opportunity.

Whilst the poor record of clean-up and decommissioning work at Sellafield continues to catch the media and Parliament's eye, it inadvertently obscures the equally important flip-side of the NDA / Sellafield Nuclear Management Partners' portfolio - the site's commercial operations or reprocessing. Whilst reprocessing continues to be sanctioned today - largely because of the (declining) revenue it provides to help offset spiralling clean-up costs - the Magnox and THORP plant continue to churn out yet more unwanted plutonium, create unnecessary additional volumes of higher activity nuclear waste and further pollute the environment through their radioactive discharges. For financial year 2013/14, the NDA projected revenue of £633m from reprocessing and fuel management services. Yet Sellafield's combined operating expenditure, (operations and capital), not including decommissioning and clean-up costs will be £972m. (2)

Over the last decade, operational targets have been consistently missed at Sellafield and the record has been getting worse, not better, since the NDA took ownership of Sellafield in 2005. (3)

In the NFLA's view, it is hard to fathom why most of the 30 tonnes of spent fuel was imported in the first place. The three Dounreay contracts which are refusing to agree to Advance Allocation are intriguing, and could cause further problems in the future, but without more information it is difficult for the NFLA to comment on them. Since these contracts could involve returning bomb-grade uranium to the country of origin NFLA hopes that paramount importance will be given to the proliferation implications of any final deal.

In short, NFLA believes that by applying environmental principles to decision-making about overseas spent fuel remaining at Sellafield, reprocessing should stop as soon as possible and transportation of

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nuclear materials, waste, plutonium and highly enriched uranium, should only be undertaken if it is impossible to come to agreement with the companies who signed reprocessing contracts with British Nuclear Fuels Limited (BNFL).

NFLA Steering Committee Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

“This consultation from DECC brings to light to the NFLA the poor record of the UK’s nuclear reprocessing industry at Sellafield. In our view, the continuing reprocessing taking place in Sellafield through THORP has been a huge and costly failure to the public purse. THORP is little more than a white elephant of a project from beginning to end, and reprocessing should end at Sellafield as soon as is practicable. The NDA can then get on with its primary job of making safe the UK’s nuclear legacy rather than being continually diverted by ongoing attempts at income generation.”

Ends

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

Notes for editors:

- (1) The NFLA Radioactive Waste Policy Briefing 50, providing a model response to the UK Government consultation for the management of overseas origin nuclear fuels stored in the UK, is attached and will go on the NFLA website.
- (2) NDA Business Plan 2013-16 <http://www.nda.gov.uk/documents/upload/NDA-Business-Plan-2013-2016.pdf>
- (3) CORE Media Release, 22nd Feb 2014  
<http://www.corecumbria.co.uk/newsapp/pressreleases/pressmain.asp?StrNewsID=335>  
CORE’s submission to PAC ‘Commercial Operations at Sellafield -Underperformance and Missed Targets’ (which also includes Appendices on the individual facilities) can be accessed at <http://www.no2nuclearpower.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Commercial-Operations-at-Sellafield.pdf>

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