

NFLA Policy Briefing No.198



Date: 9th April 2020

Subject: Summary of key points and actions from the NFLA Steering Committee telephone conference, 27th March 2020

1. Introduction to the meeting

The NFLA Steering Committee Chair, Councillor David Blackburn, welcomed all to a new, temporary arrangement of a telephone conference meeting. This replaced a planned meeting in Manchester Central Library, which was cancelled due to the Covid-19 outbreak and public health emergency. This crisis has led to a national 'lockdown' across the UK and Ireland, and extensive social distancing rules which precludes bringing people together in public meetings. It had been agreed, for practical reasons, to reduce attendance in this telephone conference call to the NSC Chair and Vice Chairs, Forum Chairs and Secretariat staff, though a progress report had been issued to all members.

2. The covid-19 outbreak and future meetings / ongoing work of the Secretariat

The NFLA Secretary noted that the emergence of the Covid-19 global public health emergency is unprecedented, and has led to a full public lockdown across Europe and the wider world. As a result, it has led Councils to cancel all public meetings and put into place business continuity arrangements. Most staff, where possible and practical, including the NFLA Secretary, were having to work from home for the foreseeable future. Telephone and video conferencing facilities are now beginning to be used, but it will take some time for them to be effective, and issues clearly remain around Councils having different IT software for future NFLA meetings.

A direct and initial action from the NFLA Secretariat had been to cancel the NFLA Steering Committee and Mayors for Peace meeting of the 27th March (and replace the Steering Committee with this telephone conference), the NFLA Welsh Forum meeting of the 3rd April, the NFLA Scotland Forum of the 23rd April and the NFLA All Ireland Sustainable Energy Forum of the 1st May. It was hoped to hold meetings in a different way in the future, but it would depend on the logistics around organising that.

With a full lockdown in the UK and Ireland now in place, it is impossible to hold public meetings for a period of at least 12 weeks – which could be early to mid-June. The resumption of 'normal' operations will depend solely on the success of the lockdown.

The meeting agreed that it was important for the NFLA Steering Committee Chair, Vice Chairs, NFLA National Forum Chairs and Vice Chairs, and NFLA Secretariat staff (as well as the wider membership) to keep in regular contact. It was agreed to hold a follow-up telephone conference like this one in around 6 – 8 weeks to monitor progress with the work of the NFLA Secretariat. The NFLA Secretary is also looking into videoconferencing software like Zoom, Google Meet (which Manchester City Council uses – you do not need a google account to access it) and, for smaller meetings of one or two people, WhatsApp and Skype.

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It was felt important by the Steering Committee for the NFLA Secretariat to progress a number of reports, consultation responses, newsletters and media releases to maintain the profile of the organisation during this period. It was agreed one such report should be a focus on the coronavirus and its impact on the nuclear sector, as well as what should happen to the global economy after it is over in terms of a 'green stimulus' and reduction in spending on nuclear weapons. These reports should be approved by the NFLA Steering Committee Chair and Forum Chairs as relevant when they are ready.

Action: The NFLA Secretary to arrange for a follow-up Chairs and Vice Chairs telephone conference meeting in 6 – 8 weeks to monitor Secretariat progress. The NFLA Secretariat to continue to develop and publish reports approved by the Chair or the Forum Chairs. The NFLA Secretary to investigate the possible use of videoconferencing facilities for future meetings, if feasible to organise.

3. **NFLA Forums progress, elections and Brexit / nuclear policy**

NFLA English Forum public meeting in Suffolk, 14th March –

This meeting took place just prior to the enhanced restrictions on public meetings. Over 75 people attended a detailed and inspiring meeting organised by the NFLA in association with the local groups TASC, TEAGS and Friends of the Earth Suffolk Coastal. The audience included around 15 – 20 parish, town, district and county councillors. The presentations from the meeting are on the NFLA website, along with three 'You Tube' videos. The Secretary has sent this to all Suffolk councillors and will send formal letters to Parish and Town Councils to consider NFLA membership. The meeting was well received and proved very useful at enhancing connections with local groups and the local community.

Other Forums and their resumption –

As noted above the plans for Forum meetings in Wales, Scotland and Ireland have all had to be cancelled / postponed, though efforts at looking at alternative ways to hold these meetings was being investigated.

In terms of the ***NFLA Welsh Forum***, the planned April 3rd meeting in Cardiff County Hall would have particularly focused on the 'Hinkley mud' and Hinkley C new nuclear issues. A detailed submission to the Natural Resources Wales consultation on the movement of sediment from the Hinkley Point site to the Cardiff Deep Grounds was submitted prior to the 24th March deadline. An easy to read version of this submission is being put together to go on the NFLA website and be publicised shortly. The detailed submission was put together by Tim Deere-Jones with support from NFLA, CND Cymru and Stop Hinkley. The speakers for the planned seminar have all agreed to speak at a rescheduled meeting, whenever this can be organised. The NFLA Secretary is talking with Welsh anti-nuclear and environmental groups about keeping this issue in the public realm, and how a 'webinar' or some type of event can be held in the near future.

For the ***NFLA Scotland Forum***, the planned April 23rd meeting in Renfrewshire House, Paisley was postponed, but a telephone conference in its place is being looked into. In the meantime, it was agreed by the Convener and Vice Convener that the NFLA Scotland Policy Advisor will produce his usual report which will go out to all members, to go on the NFLA website, and, where useful, parts of it be developed into a media release.

The ***NFLA All Ireland Forum Sustainable Energy Forum*** meeting planned for the 1st May in O'Hagan House, Newry was cancelled and will also be rescheduled when it is safe to do so. A telephone conference between Forum members will be investigated as a short-term alternative.

The Irish general election had made a planned meeting in early March also previously untenable. The result of that election has been an indecisive result with Sinn Fein, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael getting a similar amount of seats. The position of the Green Party and possibly Labour or the Social Democrats in determining a future coalition is still ongoing. The likeliest

coalition is a FF / FG / Independents government, but it still has not been agreed, and the coronavirus emergency is delaying final discussion and agreement.

In Northern Ireland, the Stormont Assembly has restarted and one of the first reports to be published was over the Renewable Heating Initiative overspend inquiry. Cllr Karen McKeivitt has taken over the role of Co-Chair from Cllr John Trainor as Newry, Mourne and Down Council's representative. Cllr Malcom Noonan was elected as a TD in the Republic of Ireland general election and has been involved in the discussion over the next government, as well as standing down as a councillor.

At the Steering Committee meeting Cllr David Healy of Fingal County Council agreed to be an interim Co-Chair and Cllr Colette Connolly in Galway City Council will also be approached to support this role until the next meeting can be organised. Efforts to look at developing increased profile of the new Forum are also on hold due to the coronavirus cancelling all meetings. It is a priority to get the Forum moving as soon as is possible, and some media releases where appropriate will be published.

In terms of the development of Brexit, it is likely that little short-term practical discussion can take place as both the UK Government and the EU will be fully concentrated on emergency response to covid-19. It remains to be seen if the date for the end of the transition period is extended. There also remains the economic dislocation created by the virus outbreak, and if the UK economy could take a second potential shock with Brexit. The meeting agreed that the NFLA Secretariat should continue to monitor this issue.

Action: To note the report. To publicise the ongoing work within each Forum as much as possible. To look into webinars / phone conferences where possible and practical for each Forum.

4. New nuclear

The NFLA Secretariat and the Committee meeting were concerned that construction at the Hinkley Point C site is continuing, despite the Covid-19 public health emergency. A joint complaint with other groups has been made by the NFLA to the Office of Nuclear Regulation (ONR), and a meeting with the ONR has also been requested. Construction at Hinkley Point C is ongoing at a time when other major infrastructure projects like Crossrail and HS2 have been curtailed, whilst construction on the similar Flamanville-3 site in France has been reduced to essential control and maintenance. The Committee felt it was important that public pressure locally and nationally should continue to be brought on to EDF to curtail the project while the public emergency lockdown is in place.

The NFLA Secretary reported that there was no announcement in the UK Government Budget statement to support the Revenue Asset Base financing model, which may help fund new nuclear projects. And the public health emergency is likely to delay any future announcement. The NFLA issued a media release on a BBC report that the UK Government is balking at moving forward on this given a leaked letter from the Nuclear Industry Association concerned about the lack of any government announcement.

The success of the recent NFLA meetings on Sizewell and Bradwell was centred on the strength of feeling about the likely damage to sensitive environmental land, coupled with coastal erosion and climate change. The Committee agree this needs to be a core part of the NFLA's strategy going forward and links with parish, town, district and councillors should be expanded. A planned opposition motion to Suffolk County Council to oppose the principle of supporting Sizewell C had to be postponed due to the cancellation of the meeting, but will be raised when it is possible to do so. It is expected that EDF will apply for the process of a Development Control Order public inquiry shortly, though this may also be delayed due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The National Infrastructure Commission has said there is no need for a second new nuclear plant to be built, which has also been a focus of NFLA public messages.

A first round of public consultation on Bradwell B has been commenced by CGN, and at present is going ahead despite exhibitions being cancelled. The Committee approved for a full response to this consultation to be developed and submitted by the NFLA Secretariat.

It was also noted by the NFLA Secretariat that a big public push from the nuclear industry on the benefit of small modular nuclear reactors had been made, but there were again no major announcements in the Budget, and is also likely to remain on hold whilst the public health emergency is dealt with.

Action: To continue to raise concern over construction at Hinkley Point C. To approve a response to the Bradwell B consultation and letters to local parish, town, district and county councils in the Suffolk and Essex region encouraging NFLA membership.

5. Radioactive waste

The NFLA Secretary reported that the NFLA Chair and Cllr Newman attended the most recent meeting of the LGA NuLEAF group on the 11th March in Manchester. Cllr Newman was re-elected as its Vice Chair – Manchester City Council is a contributing member of the group.

This meeting included a discussion on the transport of radioactive materials with NFLA representatives raising concerns over the amount of such transports, which continue to rise, and their safety. This follows a recent transport between Sellafield and Hunterston, where radioactive graphite debris was still found in one of the nuclear flasks. An investigation is taking place on this matter. It was reported that the NDA's transport business was being merged and will change markedly as reprocessing concludes.

There was also a discussion on Site End States for decommissioned facilities and the NDA Strategy for 2021 – 26 – consultations on both are expected later in the year. In addition, the NDA will hold its annual Stakeholder Summit in September in Edinburgh. The NFLA Secretary urged it to be a joint meeting with the COSLA SCCORS group.

The coronavirus outbreak has affected the Sellafield site, where a considerable number of workers have tested positive for it. As a result, all reprocessing at the site has been suspended, and only essential activity is taking place at it and other NDA sites.

RWM has published its approach to Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) site evaluation in England and Wales. It says a GDF will only be built where there is both a willing community and a suitable site. The 'Siting factors', guided by government policy and legislation, will inform the conversations RWM will be having with communities and evaluations of site suitability. The NFLA Policy Advisor commented that the RWM response makes no mention of calls to establish the areas which are most geologically suitable rather than relying on engineered barriers in an area where geology may not be particularly suitable.

The Policy Advisor also mentions three areas of complication in recent research:

- Steel corrosion – the journal 'Nature Materials' reports research that corrosion of nuclear waste storage materials accelerates because of changes in the chemistry of the nuclear waste solution and the way the materials interact with one another. "This indicates that the current models may not be sufficient to keep this waste safely stored," The research focused on storage materials for high-level nuclear waste.
- New form of uranium – as noted in the January Steering Committee meeting, research from Manchester University has demonstrated that in conditions that prevail underground a new chemical form of uranium can temporarily occur, while small amounts of uranium are released into solution. If uranium is in solution, it could make its way into groundwater.
- Glacial erosion – new research on the impact of glacial erosion (which is being speeded up by climate change) overturned previous findings about the link between glacial flow and erosion rates. Researchers hope this will help us find a safer site, but it raises the question 'what else have we got wrong?' It needs to be pointed out that the half-life of Chlorine-36 is 300,000 years and neptunium-237 boasts a half-life of 2 million years. All this radioactivity amounts to a huge amount of maintenance to ensure that our radioactive

waste is being properly managed throughout its extraordinarily long shelf life and is not endangering anyone.

There remains slow progress on finding local authorities who may wish to volunteer to host such a repository. In a full Council meeting, Copeland Council decided that it would continue to remain neutral on the matter. Folkestone and Hythe (where Dungeness is located) remains the only other Council that has shown any specific public interest in the matter, having sent councillors to look at the French site in Bure.

As noted above, a detailed joint response has been submitted to Natural Resource Wales raising a wide range of concerns over an application by EDF Energy to dump a further 600,000m³ of sediment from the Hinkley Point site to the Cardiff Deep Grounds. A summary of this response will be published shortly in early April with a media release. The NFLA Welsh Forum Chair Cllr Galsworthy called for this report to be disseminated widely. He had sent early reports around his own council. The Welsh Forum Vice-Chair Cllr Lent said it should also be sent to Welsh Assembly Members.

Action: To note the report and respond to consultations on NDA strategy when it is launched. To welcome the NFLA response to NRW and encourage full dissemination of a summary report and media release of it.

6. Climate change and alternatives to nuclear power

The NFLA Secretary reported that the UK Government is making a welcome change to low carbon energy policy to allow onshore wind turbines to be built again. The policy change from the new Business Secretary Alok Sharma will relax planning restrictions on such developments.

The February UK Budget statement had been billed as being one of the 'greenest ever' but the response to it was tepid. There were some new commitments on planting trees, reducing plastic waste, building new flood defences and capturing carbon. The Committee on Climate Change said the budget was a "realistic start" but that it did not "close the climate policy gap". There was no support, for example, for significant public transport, walking and cycling schemes or on insulating homes. It is thought more announcements on green infrastructure and research and development may be made in the delayed National Infrastructure Strategy and the autumn UK Spending Review. The long-awaited 30-year National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS) was supposed to be published alongside the budget but it has now been delayed until May. It is likely to be delayed further by the coronavirus outbreak. The NIS is supposed to outline how £100bn will be spent over this parliament. There remains little information on what renewable energy projects will be announced under such a strategy.

In the Republic of Ireland, the government's strategy on tackling the climate emergency has been a core part of discussion in potential coalition talks following an indecisive general election. In mid-March 'The Times' reported that the Green Party were likely to be end talks with Fianna Fail and Fine Gael over concerns of a lack of any clear guarantees on the need to stimulate the economy through green infrastructure. This may lead to a FF / FG coalition deal with the support of 10 Independent TDs instead. The Irish Government which emerges is still under pressure to have a more dynamic approach to these matters. Major policy statements are unlikely to be made until after the Covid-19 outbreak is under control. A pre-election announcement to support solar energy more effectively was welcomed by the Committee.

In Northern Ireland, the arrangements to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly have taken place. One of the first major issues that the restored government has had to deal with is the inquiry report to the huge overspend of the Renewable Heating Incentive (RHI), that was a core factor in the previous collapse of the arrangements. The report suggests the huge overspend was not due to overt corruption but due to a series of serious omissions by senior civil servants and ineffective leadership from ministers. It calls for widespread reform in governance.

The NFLA has submitted a detailed response to Commonweal on its consultation in the potential benefits of a proposed Scottish Energy Development Agency. The response is on the NFLA website – it welcomes such a development but wishes to see much more detail on its remit in reducing fuel poverty.

The NFLA Secretariat is also finalising its latest progress report on how Councils should tackle the climate emergency. This report will provide a 'state of play' in how local government is involved in this issue and interacting with central government across the UK and Ireland. It will then provide a list of excellent best practice examples. A new part being worked on in the report will be what issues may block progress for councils in undertaking such work. It is anticipated to publish this report in April, to get it out to all members and find ways to send it on to other non-member authorities. The Committee welcomed the development of this report.

The Committee agreed that it was important for the NFLA Secretariat to develop an additional report on the post-response to Covid-19 in terms of lessening its impact on the economy. Whilst such a report will focus on the impacts on the nuclear industry, it was agreed that it should have considerable focus on encouraging a 'green' stimulus package to help the national and global economy following a return to normal life. The economic consequences of the current crisis are huge, and there has to be concern that the deep cuts after the 2008 financial crisis are not replicated. Greenpeace, for example, have published a 'green stimulus' plan, and the report could look at some of these ideas as well in terms of local government and decentralised energy.

Action: Support and discuss the dissemination of a new NFLA report on progress with the climate emergency; approve the production of a new NFLA report on the covid-19 emergency and the need for a post-emergency green stimulus.

7. Mayors for Peace

The NFLA Secretary noted that the national and international activities of Mayors for Peace are also affected and hindered by the coronavirus public health emergency.

At the international level, it is expected that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference due to be held in early May will be cancelled, likely to be moved to 2021. There is also a question mark over the August 3rd – 6th Mayors for Peace Executive and General Conference planned for Hiroshima. The Tokyo Olympics planned for the same time has just been postponed until 2021. A decision from Hiroshima over the conference is expected in the next fortnight. They will be hoping it can go ahead in some way, given it is the 75th anniversary of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but public safety and travel advice will need to be heeded.

At the level of the new Mayors for Peace European Chapter, a planned April meeting between Mayors for the European Lead Cities and Pope Francis has had to be cancelled. It is hoped it can be rescheduled. The new Secretariat in Granollers are finalising the statutes of the new Chapter, and a website is also being developed. There is interest in working with Manchester to hold a Chapter Conference in November during the events for the 40th anniversary of its 'nuclear free' declaration. The NFLA Secretary remains active in this discussion.

At the UK and Ireland level, the planned March 27th Chapter seminar had to be cancelled. It is hoped to reschedule it as soon as is possible. Consideration will also be required to decide if local events on the August 6th or 9th will be able to go ahead, or if instead individual member statements are sent out showing solidarity with Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As Manchester's Mayors for Peace representative, Cllr Newman agreed with the analysis over likely cancellation of the events. He suggested the NFLA Secretary develop a progress report to keep members informed.

Action: To note the report and await information from Hiroshima on the conference and events planned in August. The NFLA Secretary to write a progress report for members as appropriate.

8. Nuclear weapons and defence nuclear safety

The NFLA Secretary reported that, with the NPT Review Conference likely to be cancelled, many of the ongoing tensions with nuclear weapons may be put on hold a little as well. ICAN are currently focusing on seeking to get past the line of 50 states to ratify the TPNW, as well as challenging the 'status quo' of states that continue to support possession of nuclear weapons.

Namibia became the 36th state to formally ratify the TPNW. It was expected a number of others were due to have made their formal ratifications at a ceremony at the UN during the NPT Review Conference, but the timing of that is obviously now being reconsidered.

The ICAN Cities Appeal continues, and Barcelona was one of the most prominent new cities to support it. The NFLA Secretary has been in discussion with a number of peace NGOs who are lobbying Councils to support it. It was planned that a number of resolutions would be put forward in June after proposed local elections. As these elections have been postponed to 2021, and most Council meetings cancelled or reduced significantly, this may be delayed somewhat.

NFLA used ICAN figures in a media release on the £7.2 billion spent by the UK on nuclear weapons in 2019 and what such resource could be spent on in terms of essential health response during the coronavirus public health emergency. The media release was warmly welcomed by the Steering Committee. The NFLA media release also noted the real concerns around monitoring Iran's nuclear weapons programme, given it is one of the most affected countries for the coronavirus outbreak. North Korea claim there have been no cases of coronavirus in the country at all, but given South Korea and China were the earliest and most badly affected states, that sounds unlikely. There are real concerns the virus is rife there and that it could be have a devastating impact on this isolated state. The North Korean military undertook another 'routine' missile test on the 21st March.

Prior to the public health emergency, there had been considerable media speculation about the budget overspends and problems with developing the Trident replacement programme. This was sparked by a US military announcement that effectively said that the UK would replace the current Trident warheads with a new 'W93' missile being developed by the US. It is expected such warheads would be mounted on an existing Trident missile to save money.

In terms of the coronavirus impact, the CND General Secretary Kate Hudson has pointed out that the UK should have been better prepared given that tackling an influenza pandemic has been deemed a tier one risk to UK security for over 20 years. For example, in 2005, the World Health Organisation was praising the UK Government for its influenza pandemic preplanning work. Kate Hudson talks about what our security priorities should be and mentions health emergencies and the climate emergency as two key areas that are not getting the level of funding being spent on nuclear weapons for example. It was agreed by the Steering Committee that this could be a part of the NFLA research on coronavirus and its wider impacts.

In terms of defence nuclear safety, the NFLA is keeping in close contact with NIS and other groups who have an ongoing tribunal case with the Information Commissioner seeking to make the annual defence safety summary report public, as it used to be until 2018. It is expected the Information Commission will give its view on this shortly. The NFLA Secretary has also been asked by the Chief Executive of the Office for Nuclear Regulation to provide views on levels of engagement from the defence sector in terms of nuclear safety.

Action: To note the report and add in a section to the coronavirus report. To reconsider the ICAN Cities Appeal campaign in light of the public health emergency.

9. Civil nuclear safety, Fukushima update

The NFLA have been focusing on the Hunterston site as the oldest existing UK nuclear reactor in service, amidst real concerns over its aging reactors. Further delays in its reopening date are expected and there is a real challenge for EDF to provide all the data the nuclear regulator requires for approval. The NFLA Secretary has organised an early April meeting with the

Deputy Chief Nuclear Inspector, Dr Ian Fairlie and Rita Holmes, chair of Hunterston SSG. The NFLA Policy Advisor suggested mention also be made at the meeting for progress at the Dungeness site.

In terms of Fukushima, much coverage has occurred over events planned in the area for the Olympics, and the torch relay, but these have now been cancelled. TEPCO's plans for contaminated water to be slowly dumped into the Pacific Ocean have been discovered by the Japanese media. Any decision on the dumping of the water is likely to be delayed by the ongoing public health emergency.

Action: To note the report and welcomed the planned meeting on Hunterston B.

10. Nuclear emergency planning and transport

The NFLA Secretary is finalising a detailed report on progress with councils implementing offsite emergency plans for civil and defence nuclear plans. This report should be completed shortly for publication in April. There has again been some focus to the Hunterston and the Sizewell sites, where active Site Stakeholder Groups have challenged the assessments made. Engagement with the nuclear regulator has also taken place.

The additional time allowed with no major meetings in the near future also permits the Secretariat to reconsider and complete a full review on nuclear transport, which again can be published in April.

Action: To note the report.

11. Future meetings and discussion on ongoing Secretariat work

It is recommended that the Secretary keeps in touch with NFLA Chairs and Vice Chairs on a regular basis. A date in early May will be looked at to hold a telephone conference and publicised to members as soon as it is agreed.

In the meantime, it was agreed that there was a real need to keep feeding members with regular updates, detailed reports, media releases and newsletters. The NFLA Chair thanked all for attending the telephone conference in these trying times, and thanked the NFLA Secretariat for keeping up its ongoing activity, reports and research despite the challenges of home-working and travel restrictions.