

# NFLA Policy Briefing No.202



Date: 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Subject: Summary of key points and actions from the NFLA Steering Committee telephone conference, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020

## 1. Introduction to the meeting

The NFLA Steering Committee Chair, Councillor David Blackburn, welcomed all to the telephone conference meeting. Councillor Blackburn noted and welcomed the good attendance for the meeting which was an indication of strong support for the recent work of the Secretariat.

## 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 remains unprecedented, and has led to a full public lockdown across Europe and the wider world. It is now in the fifth / sixth week of a full public 'lockdown' in the UK and Ireland, which has had a dramatic impact on both the ways Councils work, and what they need to undertake during this unprecedented public health emergency.

After the 27th March Steering Committee meeting focused the activity of the Secretariat, the following work pattern and workstreams have been undertaken:

- The NFLA Secretary has been working from home since 17th March. Home working has gone more or less well.
- There have been telephone conferences for the NFLA Steering Committee meeting of the 27th March and this meeting on the 1st May, as well as the NFLA Scotland Committee on the 24th April.
- The NFLA Secretary has held phone chats or video calls with councillors and / or colleagues. There has been a phone conference for the Arms Conversion Defence Diversification Steering Group, for two meetings with the nuclear regulator, and a meeting with the Strathclyde Pension Fund; and an international webinar / Facebook live broadcast on divestment policies. The next NuLEAF meeting plans to use Microsoft Teams.
- Video chats are beginning to grow as well. The NFLA Secretary takes part in a weekly internal team meeting using Google Hangouts, and the European Mayors for Peace Working Group uses the package Jitsi (similar to Zoom). The NFLA Secretary has also been interviewed on the ICAN Cities Appeal for CND, which has been converted into a YouTube clip, and can be found on the NFLA website.
- The NFLA Secretary has had some training on the use of Google Hangouts / Meet. The Secretariat is looking to hold NFLA Forum seminars and Steering using this video conferencing package in June. In addition, the NFLA Secretary is looking to do some 'podcasts' with relevant independent experts that could also go out to members and on the NFLA website.
- The NFLA Secretariat has published four reports, which are noted below. 7 media releases and 4 letters to the media have also been processed.

The Steering Committee welcomed the progress of the Secretariat in such difficult times. There was an encouragement to look at undertaking video conferences for the four Forums in June.

## THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES: WORKING FOR A RENEWABLE, SAFE & RENEWABLE FUTURE

C/o Nuclear Policy, Level 5, Town Hall Extension, Manchester, M60 3NY

Tel: 0161 234 3244 E-Mail: [s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk) Website: <http://www.nuclearpolicy.info>

One of the NFLA reports approved by the Steering Committee noted that Covid-19 has seen a considerable reduction in economic activity and carbon emissions. A wider analysis suggests it will cause global emission cuts of around 1,600m tonnes of CO2. However, this is only around 4% of cuts made in 2019. It does not come close to the 7.6% fall required every year in order to limit a temperate increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius. The report outlines issues over concern with the outbreak and business continuity in the nuclear power and nuclear weapons sector. The outbreak shows the need to build resilience into all systems to deal not just with future public health emergencies but also the wider and much more alarming climate crisis. It argues that the crisis should be seen as an opportunity to allow policymakers the space to put in place a sustainable energy system to spur a clean renewable energy revolution. The report concludes with a focus on how an effective local energy response should be a part of that change.

The Steering Committee welcomed this detailed report and it was encouraged to disseminate it widely.

***Action: To note the report, welcome the NFLA's Covid-19 report and look to hold webinars in June.***

## **2. NFLA Forums progress**

### ***NFLA Scotland Forum telephone conference, 24th April –***

This meeting was transferred into a telephone conference. The NFLA Scotland Policy Adviser provided a detailed report to members on the development of Scottish nuclear and energy policy and the NFLA Secretary to outline developments with the Secretariat, reports and an update on Mayors for Peace. Members agreed to hold a further telephone conference or video call on the 19<sup>th</sup> June. The NFLA Scotland Policy Advisor's report for the Forum is now on the NFLA website.

An afternoon meeting was held with the CEO of the Strathclyde Pension Fund and the NFLA Scotland Vice-Convener, the NFLA Secretary and a representative from the Don't Bank on the Bomb Scotland campaign to discuss the issue of divestment. The meeting was thorough and robust. A written response to NFLA queries was requested. The NFLA Scotland Forum agreed it would be useful for the NFLA Secretary to develop a wider report together on the issues around divestment. In the UK Supreme Court a judgement for the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign against the UK Government confirms that ethical divestment in the areas of defence and foreign policy is still permitted from public pension funds. Legislation on the matter had been intimated from the UK Government, but it will now have to consider this in light of the Supreme Court judgement.

### ***Other NFLA Forums –***

It had been agreed with the Co-Chairs of the NFLA All Ireland Sustainable Energy Forum to hold a webinar on the 5<sup>th</sup> June. This will include a presentation on how Councils in Ireland could tackle the climate emergency, and how Covid-19 should lead to a green recovery across the island of Ireland.

The Steering Committee also agreed that it would be useful to hold a joint NFLA English and NFLA Welsh Forum webinar looking at the issues around 'Hinkley mud' and the ongoing development of Hinkley Point C, as well as how Councils in England and Wales can tackle the climate emergency. This meeting will be held on the 12<sup>th</sup> June.

The three webinars would be restricted to NFLA members and invited representatives only at this point to allow for getting use to new technology.

***Action: To note the report and encourage attendance at NFLA Forum webinars in June.***

## **3. New nuclear build**

The NFLA Secretariat has been active in raising concerns over continuing construction at Hinkley Point C, despite the wider lockdown of the economy. One of the anomalies of the UK Government's lockdown policy was to exempt construction from the list of sectors that had to curtail work. Whilst some large building companies did stop work, others did not, including the contracted work to build Hinkley Point C.

The NFLA Secretary, with the approval of the NFLA Chair, co-signed a joint letter from the NGO Chairs of the BEIS NGO Forum and ONR NGO Forum, Professor Andy Blowers and Jill Sutcliffe, to the UK Government and the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) raising real concern over the local health concerns by continuing to permit construction at the site. This led to a telephone conference with the ONR at which the regulator confirmed that the level of staffing at Hinkley Point had been reduced from 4.2k to around 2,000 workers. Essential work is the focus of that work, such as securing the reactor concrete base. The regulator acknowledged that early photos showed a lack of social distancing at buses and in the catering area, but said that these were now improved after discussion by EDF.

Following the meeting, after further concerns were raised by the local group Stop Hinkley, a second joint letter seeking further information in the communication between EDF and the ONR was requested. Stop Hinkley have also written to the ONR over a number of 'whistleblower' calls to them that social distancing is not happening in the tunnels being built on the site, and again in the catering areas. A response to these queries are expected imminently. In the letters, the NGOs and the NFLA concluded at the public meeting that it appeared the nuclear sector was in a privileged status during this public health emergency, as it has been in the past. The NFLA will continue to follow up this issue of concern as the Covid-19 lockdown is maintained.

In terms of prospects for Sizewell C, there are continued suggestions that EDF is seeking to call for a Development Consent Order inquiry in May from the National Infrastructure Directorate, the final stage in public approval for the reactors. It is clear the development of new reactors have provoked deep splits in Suffolk. Following the March NFLA meeting, the Secretariat has sought to keep involved in the public debate over the DCO, which includes published letters in the East Anglian Daily Times and sending information of its concerns to all councillors in Suffolk and Essex. A letter of 60 prominent individuals opposing the moves towards a DCO during the Covid-19 outbreak has been published in The Times, and the opposition political groups on Suffolk County Council, as well as over 50 parish and town Councils, have called for the same action. On the converse, the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce and trade unions with nuclear workers have called on EDF to submit the DCO request as soon as is practical.

A first round of public consultation on Bradwell B has been commenced by CGN, and at present is going ahead despite exhibitions being cancelled, though the consultation date has been extended to July 1st. The NFLA Secretariat is currently putting together a response to that consultation.

The NFLA joined with its European partners CNFE and the Alliance of Regions, as well as 50 other pan-EU NGOs to a letter to the European Commission supporting its Technical Evidence Group that new nuclear should not be provided with any subsidy. A consultation on this matter closed on the 27th April, and the pro-nuclear sector sent extensive responses in seeking a reversal of this decision.

Documents released by the ONR (after an eight month campaign by Dr David Lowry) suggest that the UK Government have been providing extensive funding to the ONR to consider 'advanced nuclear technologies' like fast breeder plutonium reactors and small modular reactors. The documents appear in an article by 'The Ferret' and include concerns from the likes of the NFLA Scotland Policy Advisor of resurrecting the fast breeder reactor programme, which had ended in 1994 at Dounreay. Whilst it still remains unlikely that plutonium reactors may be developed, as there is no real market for them, it shows the public push for small modular reactors remains high.

Rolls-Royce is currently leading a consortium to build small modular reactors (SMRs) and has suggested they could be installed in former nuclear sites in Cumbria or in Wales. The Company has said it wants to install and operate between 10 and 15 factory-built reactors by 2029. The UK Government is investing £18m in the consortium, and this is matched by an industry consortium, whose partners include Atkins, the National Nuclear Laboratory and Wood, who have been working on the preliminary design for four years. The plan is that each modular 440 MW reactor would cost £1.8bn (once five have been built) with further savings possible, the industrial partners

said. It needs to be noted that the designs will have to be approved by the ONR, and there remains major questions over high costs and the wider supply chain.

Action: To note the report and develop a response to the Bradwell B local consultation.

#### 4. **Radioactive waste**

The NFLA Secretariat is monitoring the public discussion over whether sites and communities will be found for a deep underground radioactive waste repository. An article in the New Scientist magazine suggests a number of towns, counties and even individual landowners have put themselves forward as candidates, without specifically naming them. The magazine suggests the list includes a number of small local authorities and a county council, businesses and individual landowners from the north west, south east, south west and the Midlands. No Councils have come forward in Wales, and the programme does not cover Scotland or Northern Ireland. Moving any of this forward is on hold during the lockdown, but talks are likely to be taking place between such Councils and landowners and the UK Government.

All NDA sites, including Sellafield, have reduced their activity to essential operations only, as the number of affected workers with Covid-19 at Sellafield in the early part of the lockdown began to rise. No reprocessing at the site is currently taking place, which may affect their plans to finish work as planned by the end of 2020. A detailed analysis of the plutonium stockpile at Sellafield has recently been made by the influential Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, with an additional article by Dr Ian Fairlie. The UK has the largest plutonium stockpile in the world, and the article outlined the huge financial costs of storing this material. The UK Government has still not determined what to do with this material – reprocess it or immobilise it. NFLA has consistently called for immobilising the material. The Steering Committee agreed that the NFLA Secretary develop a Radioactive Waste Briefing bringing together the issues around the ongoing storage of plutonium.

Plans to have a public consultation on the NDA's planned strategy for 2021 – 25 have been delayed by the Covid-19 outbreak. A planned consultation event in May had to be cancelled. It was expected that a public consultation on the matter was due in the summer, but this could be moved back to the autumn.

Another radioactive waste issue from the Covid-19 outbreak is the ongoing regulation of radioactive waste sites. 'The Ferret' has reported that Faslane nuclear base and nuclear power plants have been given the green light to potentially break safety limits on radioactive waste. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has relaxed environmental rules for specific sectors, notably the military and civil nuclear industry whilst the lockdown is in place. A "temporary regulatory position statement" has been posted on its website. According to SEPA, during a significant outbreak of COVID-19 the ability of operators to run their operations may be compromised by a lack of available staff, the need to protect staff and minimise transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

The NFLA Scotland Vice Convener Cllr Audrey Doig commented: "NFLA has been concerned that the nuclear industry is being given a privileged status during this covid-19 outbreak, as can be seen with the continuing work at the Hinkley Point site. These new rules from SEPA seems to allow further leeway on nuclear sites over the handling of radioactive waste at defence and civil nuclear sites. Whilst we are living in very difficult times in undertaking normal activity, they are for the reasons of public safety. SEPA should be very wary of relaxing rules and find ways of continuing to regulate the industry in the robust, safe and secure way the public expects."

In a separate development, NuLEAF has asked for comments on two documents by the 5th May – one is a briefing paper on retrievability issues with an underground repository and the other is UK Government Planning Guidance for On-site Radioactive Waste Management. The NFLA Secretary is seeking to respond to these documents. NuLEAF are planning a videoconferencing business meeting on the 10th June. The NFLA Secretary and English Forum representatives are likely to link into it.

In reference to the Dalgety Bay site, the Ministry of Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) appointed Balfour Beatty in March to begin the delayed project to remove the radioactive material

found close to the beach. The work is aimed to be completed by September. NFLA welcomes that this work has finally got underway and will liaise with Fife Council over its delivery.

In terms of the Dounreay site, Babcock International could lose the contract to decommission it. Cavendish, a division of Babcock, currently runs Dounreay in a joint venture with American engineering companies Aecom and Jacobs. The deal was signed in 2012 and runs until the 2030s. However, the NDA is understood to be considering stripping the company of the contract according to reports in the journal Nuclear Engineering International. The NDA publicly say no decision has been made.

Actions: To note the report. The NFLA Secretary to develop a Radioactive Waste Policy Briefing about progress and costs on the Sellafield plutonium stockpile.

## 5. **Climate change and alternatives to nuclear power**

The NFLA Steering Committee approved and welcomed the NFLA's latest progress report on how Councils should tackle the climate emergency. This report provides a 'state of play' in how local government is involved in this issue and interacting with central government across the UK and Ireland. It also puts forward some new ideas in this emerging area of policy. A detailed annex outlines an exhaustive list of excellent best practice examples. It is planned to try and publicise and disseminate this report throughout May.

A parallel report, as noted above, looks at the Covid-19 outbreak in reference to the climate crisis. This report includes consideration of future actions from central and local government to move forward with an economic plan that puts tackling the climate crisis at the heart of it.

The Steering Committee welcomed both reports as keeping NFLA at the centre of the discussion on the climate emergency.

In wider issues, the planned COP26 international climate change conference in the autumn in Glasgow has been put back to 2021 due to the Covid-19 outbreak. There is also a delay until the end of the year in the Committee on Climate Change's analysis for the 6th carbon budget, and the Scottish Government's climate change plan will be published now later in the year.

The Steering Committee welcomed the Scottish Government's £1.8bn 'net zero' spending plans providing support for green infrastructure, low carbon heating, and tree planting as it seeks to place tackling the climate emergency "at the heart" of its programme. The net zero investment includes £220m seed funding for the Scottish National Investment Bank "to support its mission to drive the transition to a net zero economy", and a new £120m Heat Transition Deal to help decarbonise homes and buildings in Scotland. Energy efficiency spending has been increased to £151m this year. In addition, public transport has secured a Budget boost, with increased investment in rail services of £270m, taking total investment in rail and bus services to £1.55bn in 2020-21, as well as more than £85m investment towards increasing active travel. A further £5m has been earmarked to fund the roll out of electric police cars.

A consultation is taking place on Welsh Government plans to ensure all new houses built in Wales after 2025 should be powered by renewable energy. This is a part of the Welsh Government's plans for Wales being zero carbon by 2020.

In Northern Ireland, following the climate emergency declaration by the NI Assembly in February, and the backing of the creation of an independent body to protect the environment in February 2020, it has now been included in the Programme for Government in the deal which re-established the political institutions. Plans on how this will be fully developed are expected later in the year.

In the Republic of Ireland, the decisions on which schemes will be supported to develop renewable energy around the island, including new support for solar and offshore wind, will be concluded imminently. The inconclusive recent general election has delayed somewhat further moves in this area. If the Green Party joins Fianna Fail and Fine Gael in the new government then it is expected that it will be pledged to look at carbon reductions of 7% per year, far higher

than at present. The Green Party questions put forward to the other parties call for a step-change in low carbon action. The next NFLA All Ireland Sustainable Energy Forum will concentrate on this in a webinar.

**Action: To note the report and approve the NFLA report on progress with the climate emergency.**

## 6. **Mayors for Peace**

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, due to be held in early May, has been postponed and moved to a provisional date of January 2021. The Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have issued a statement on behalf of Mayors for Peace calling for renewed debate on multilateral nuclear disarmament in the intervening delay.

The August Mayors for Peace Executive and General Conference planned for Hiroshima has also been postponed until the following year. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are looking at appropriate ways to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the nuclear weapon attacks on the cities. All NFLA and Mayors for Peace members are also asked to consider how they can do likewise, taking account of social distancing rules.

The Mayors for Peace European Chapter are finalising the statutes of the new Chapter, and a website is also being developed. Public events to launch some of this work are having to be reconsidered given the likelihood of some kind of social distancing being in place till the end of 2020, along with potential restrictions on overseas travel. A planned meeting with Pope Francis has been moved back until September or October.

At the UK and Ireland level, a planned March 27th Chapter seminar had to be cancelled. It is hoped to reschedule to late June / early July after the next NFLA Steering Committee as a webinar.

**Action: To note the report. Members to consider how they can locally commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first use of nuclear weapons.**

## 7. **Nuclear weapons and defence nuclear safety**

With the NPT Review Conference cancelled, there may be some scope to reduce the ongoing tensions within the nuclear weapons debate. ICAN is currently focusing on lobbying for 50 states to ratify the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), as well as challenging the 'status quo' of states that continue to support possession of nuclear weapons.

The ICAN Cities Appeal continues, and the NFLA Secretary was interviewed as part of a CND campaign to push for more Councils passing resolutions supporting the TPNW. This 'You Tube' clip is now on the NFLA website, and has been shared with ICAN. A number of Councils were being lined up to pass resolutions in June, but as Council meetings have had to be cancelled or scaled back considerably due to the lockdown, this matter is now on hold.

In its Covid-19 report, NFLA quote the comments of the CND General Secretary Kate Hudson 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. Health emergencies and the climate emergency are two key areas that are not getting the level of funding being spent on nuclear weapons.

In terms of defence nuclear safety, as noted above, NFLA is concerned about a dilution of regulation on defence sites like Faslane during the Covid-19 outbreak. This follows a response by NFLA to a SEPA consultation on Faslane and Coulport which notes a major increase in waste discharges with concern.

**Action: To note the report. To reconsider the ICAN Cities Appeal campaign in light of the public health emergency.**

**8. Civil nuclear safety, Fukushima and Chernobyl update**

Over the past year, the NFLA have been focusing on the Hunterston site as the oldest existing UK nuclear reactor amid concerns over the level of keyway root cracking. The NFLA Secretary, Dr Ian Fairlie and Rita Holmes, chair of Hunterston SSG, had a telephone conference with the Deputy Chief Nuclear Inspector and a lead Nuclear Safety Inspector over EDF's renewed safety cases for the reopening of Reactors 3 and 4. The meeting confirmed that EDF was seeking a three month restart of the reactors, and had provided new information on seismic data. It is possible the ONR may make its decision on the EDF safety case by early June 2020. NFLA remain highly concerned with the level of keyway root cracks in the reactors and graphite debris in the reactors, which was a focal part of the meeting with the ONR. NFLA will seek a follow-up meeting when ONR has made its decision on the safety case.

In terms of Fukushima, TEPCO's plans for contaminated water to be slowly dumped into the Pacific Ocean, likely to be supported by the Japanese Government, is coming potentially closer. Japanese NGOs are leading an international petition opposing such a decision.

A series of dangerous moorland fires have come within 1km of the Chernobyl site and led to concerns that radioactive material has been spread in the fires to a greater distance. It looks like the fires are under control at the moment, and there are suggestions in the media they may have been started deliberately. There has to be a concern they could resume as the summer approaches.

**Action: To note the report.**

**9. Nuclear emergency planning and transport**

The NFLA Secretary is finalising a report on progress with Councils implementing offsite emergency plans for civil and defence nuclear plants. A draft was considered by the Steering Committee. This report has some focus to the Hunterston and the Sizewell sites, as well as alternative international practice.

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 will be finalised shortly.

**Action: To note the report.**

**10. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Steering Committee will be a video or a telephone conference on June 26<sup>th</sup>.