

# Nuclear Free Local Authorities Secretariat

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Chair: Bailie George Regan Secretary: Sean Morris



Elaine Munnelly  
Royal Society Science Centre  
6 – 9 Carlton House Terrace  
London  
SW1Y 5AG

7<sup>th</sup> July 2010

Dear Ms Munnelly,

## **Royal Society project on nuclear non-proliferation: call for evidence**

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) only became aware of the above project on the 7<sup>th</sup> July but is keen to provide a submission to it for the deadline of the 9<sup>th</sup> July. With the limited time I attach the responses submitted by the NFLA to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) for its pre-consultations on long-term plutonium management on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2009 and the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009. They have relevance to the Royal Society's project.

The NFLA would like to be further engaged in this project and I would be grateful if you could send further information, events, workshops and consultation requests to the NFLA Secretary, Sean Morris via [s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk) in the future.

1. NFLA response to DECC, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2009

### ***Long Term Plutonium Management: Key Factors Discussion Paper Comments from Nuclear Free Local Authorities***

The NFLA\* are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the DECC discussion paper on the key factors in developing a strategy on long-term plutonium management. The NFLA welcome the Government's decision to develop a medium and long-term strategy on the management of plutonium stockpiles.

#### **Options for plutonium storage**

DECC's discussion paper identifies three credible options for the management of the UK's plutonium stockpile. The NFLA view on which is preferred is as follows:

- **Reuse.** The NFLA believes that converting the existing stockpile of UK plutonium to Mixed Oxide (MoX) Fuel would require the construction of a new MoX fuel fabrication plant. This would **not** be an economic use of resources and there are many other more efficient climate abatement options. Spent MoX fuel would be a much more hazardous waste form to deal with than conventional spent fuel. Furthermore, the use of MoX fuels rather than as a waste product would mean that the UK fails to meet its non-proliferation objectives. It also involves quite unacceptable safety and security risks. The NFLA also perceives a potential threat to civil liberties, as it does not want to see large armed plutonium waste convoys being transported up and down the country between Sellafield and potential new MoX burning reactors.

- **Treat as waste.** This option would be the **NFLA's preferred option**. Unwanted plutonium should be blended down or otherwise immobilised and managed as waste. The material should remain under international safeguards until it can be shown that it would be impossible to reuse it. All immobilization options mentioned in the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's (NDA) plutonium credible options paper should be investigated further and tested against environmental principles, including in particular proliferation resistance, and other criteria such as cost, dose levels to the workforce and the highest levels of health and safety. The NFLA acknowledges the difficulties for DECC and the NDA in this option, but feel that it is the most sensible and practical choice available.
- **Indefinite storage.** The NFLA accepts that there is a need to store plutonium stocks securely in the interim period before it can be treated as waste, and agrees with the discussion paper's assessment of the difficulties in doing this. The NFLA notes that the NDA's credible options paper notes storage of plutonium at the Sellafield site until 2120, which gives adequate time to develop and improve waste treatment strategy. The NFLA believes that indefinite storage is not suitable as a long-term option, and that plutonium stocks should be placed beyond any possible future use, which could potentially include use as a fissile material in the production of nuclear weapons. The NFLA also believes that the creation of further plutonium stocks should be stopped as quickly as possible.

## **DECC involvement with stakeholders**

The NFLA believe it is imperative that the Government does not identify any lead or preferred option for future plutonium management in the forthcoming consultation expected later this year. If the Government did take this course of action it would give relevant stakeholders the view that the Government had already made up its mind on the issue, with little value to engage in the main consultation exercise.

The NFLA actively took part in the DECC stakeholder dialogue in April 2009 and the NDA stakeholder dialogue on plutonium storage in May 2009 and asserted the views mentioned above. It would wish to see a consultation process that leaves options open as far as possible. This will allow for a fair and transparent process to take account of **all** stakeholder views.

## **Key factors in decision-making**

The NFLA considers that, from the list presented in the DECC discussion paper, the following key factors are the most important, and should have the highest weighting, in any future ranking process:

- Safety and hazard.
- Security and proliferation resistance.
- Environmental impact, and social impact on local communities at any sites affected by the management option selected.
- Feasibility and technical viability.

In addition to the factors listed in the discussion paper, we think it is important to address the following factors when assessing options:

- ***Intergenerational equity:*** Any management option selected will have potential costs to future generations, who will not benefit from our generation's use of plutonium in the way that we have. As far as possible the legacy costs of managing plutonium should be paid up-front, rather than passed on to future generations.
- ***International safeguarding requirements:*** The NFLA believe that it must be possible to demonstrate that the UK remains within its international obligations to have stocks of plutonium available for inspection. This demonstrates that it is complying with safeguarding requirements until the material has been placed beyond use in such a way that is satisfied by international atomic regulators.
- ***Military use of plutonium:*** Depending on the progress of international disarmament negotiations, it will in due course be necessary to include defence stocks of plutonium within the scope of the UK's plutonium management strategy.

The forthcoming plutonium strategy should not ignore or exclude the defence plutonium stockpile and should consider options for, in due course, bringing material held in the defence stockpile under international safeguards and eventual long term management alongside civilian stocks. These should then be brought under the jurisdiction of the NDA.

### **CoRWM consideration of plutonium management**

The NFLA notes that many of the issues raised in the discussion paper have already been considered at length by the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM). The NFLA recommends that the team in DECC responsible for development of a long-term plutonium strategy should learn from, and build on, the work of CoRWM.

### **Future consultation**

The NFLA would be grateful if DECC would keep it informed of future steps in development of the plutonium management strategy. The NFLA would be happy to be involved in any future stakeholder meetings on this issue and believe it would be useful to undertake such a meeting before a formal consultation report is issued.

2. NFLA response to DECC, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009

### ***Long Term Plutonium Management: Decision Methodology and Timetable Discussion Paper Comments from Nuclear Free Local Authorities***

The NFLA are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the second DECC discussion paper covering decision methodology and a timetable for decision-making for long-term plutonium management strategy. The NFLA welcome the Government's decision to develop a medium and long-term strategy on the management of plutonium stockpiles.

## **DECC preliminary view and timing of decision**

In section 3.3 of the discussion paper DECC clearly state that none of the above options have been worked up in complete detail, in particularly the options around indefinite storage - which DECC refers to as 'disposal options'. Yet by section 4.1 DECC has concluded that the Government considers that focussing its efforts on a preliminary view of the most appropriate long term solutions will give the best prospects towards a final long-term solution. The jump from one to the other is not adequately explained. DECC need to explain how they have come to the view that there is a need to put forward its preliminary opinion.

The NFLA believe that DECC should not be giving a preliminary view until the above options have been considered in greater detail one by one. Furthermore the NFLA would like to ask DECC to clarify how their 'initial screening process' mentioned in section 3.8 differs from the NDA credible options paper – there is absolutely no explanation of this process in the paper, so it is impossible for the NFLA to take a view on it. Where there is such a lack of information or scientific and technical uncertainty then DECC should clearly indicate this during the consultation and the decision-making process.

The third phase of a decision by the Justifying Authority (mentioned in the consultative paper) should consider the ongoing tension between the Secretary of State being the Justifying Authority when the Government may have already given its view. This has been a major concern to the NFLA in the current Justification decision on new nuclear build in which the Secretary of State is the Justifying Authority and yet has made many consistent positive public announcements prior to the consultation in favour of new nuclear build. This creates obvious issues of whether the decision is neutral and legitimate.

Should the Government give a preliminary view on plutonium storage the same concerns that it has now made up its mind without adequate consultation will be an inevitable conclusion and should therefore be avoided in the view of the NFLA.

As noted in the NFLA response to the first consultation paper and to reiterate again, the NFLA wish to see a consultation process that leaves options open as far as possible. This will allow for a fair and transparent process to take account of **all** stakeholder views.

## **Key issues in decision methodology**

Again, as noted in our last response, the NFLA considers that the following key factors are the most important, and should have the highest weighting, in any future ranking process:

- Safety and hazard.
- Security and proliferation resistance.
- Environmental impact, and social impact on local communities at any sites affected by the management option selected.
- Feasibility and technical viability.

The NFLA feel a full and open consultation process should be undertaken by DECC, with a structured series of public stakeholder dialogue events. The NFLA suggest that DECC speak to CoRWM on how they undertake public stakeholder engagement and the Environment Council, who provide facilitation to the NDA stakeholder dialogue. The discussion which took part in the first phase of CoRWM's work deliberately left all options open, ensured wide-ranging fair discussion and built trust and confidence in its work. The NFLA encourages DECC to use a similar approach.

The NFLA would also like to point out that decisions made in the past by 'expert' technical opinion in nuclear policy matters have often been flawed and led to costly mistakes. Full public engagement with a wide range of interest groups from across society, using accessible and transparent language, will provide a greater opportunity for a conclusion that has wide acceptability.

## **Conclusion**

The most important point which the NFLA wish to make about this discussion paper is that DECC should not put forward any preliminary view but simply provide a status report, based on the outstanding work which needs still to be undertaken – preferably by the NDA. After this is achieved DECC should then come back with a more considered response in order to allow for more informed stakeholder engagement. The NDA's credible options report provides a substantial list of future research which is still required.

The NFLA remains keen to be involved in all future stakeholder engagement on this important issue and wishes to be kept informed by DECC of future steps in development of the plutonium management strategy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean Morris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sean Morris  
Secretary of Nuclear Free Local Authorities UK and Ireland

\* The Nuclear Free Local Authorities are made up of member councils from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Leading members include the cities of Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Cardiff, Bridgend, Dublin and Newry. Further details on its workstreams can be downloaded from <http://www.nuclearpolicy.info> or by contacting the NFLA Secretariat using the details at the top of this letter.