

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 7th March 2023
Item: 6
Subject: Updates on national developments in radioactive waste management
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Introduction:

This paper updates members on recent developments in radioactive waste management and NDA operations. It covers:

- NDA Group update;
- UK Government update;
- Small Modular Reactors (SMRs);
- Fusion Power;
- Regulatory update;
- Nuleaf news; and
- International news.

Recommendation:

This paper is for noting.

1. NDA Group update

1.1 Nuleaf has submitted its response to the consultation on the **NDA Business Plan 2023-26**, which closed on the 6th February¹. We are grateful for the feedback and comments on our draft submission.

1.2 The NDA has published the results of its **annual stakeholder survey**². A total of almost 900 people provided their views through phone interviews and an online questionnaire. Overall, the survey showed that perceptions of the NDA are improving, with 64% of respondents stating they would speak positively of the Authority and 89% believing the NDA acts in an open and transparent way.

¹ <https://www.nuleaf.org.uk/policy-communications/consultation-responses-2/>

² [Survey reflects increasingly positive stakeholder's view of NDA - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/survey-reflects-increasingly-positive-stakeholder-view-of-nda)

At the same time a number of areas were highlighted where it was felt the Authority could do better. These included:

- Reaching a wider, more diverse set of stakeholders;
- Better communication around the technical challenges faced in dealing with high-hazard materials;
- Reservations about whether the NDA achieves value for money – though the 'One NDA' approach was seen as a step forward;
- A view among stakeholders in other parts of the country that NDA can be too focussed on operations in West Cumbria.

1.3 Jonathan Cook of Copeland Borough Council attended a meeting of the **Integrated Waste Management Industry Forum** in Manchester on the 6th December. He noted a range of updates and points of interest including the following:

- Nuclear Waste Services is currently preparing a corporate strategy and a road map for the organisation to 2030.
- EDF is in the process of establishing a landfill disposal route for VLLW rubble from dismantling AGRs. They plan to test the strategy at two stations then roll out across the remaining sites.
- Hinkley Point C is exploring with Sizewell C and other nuclear developers the creation of a formal new build focused industry group to share information and best practice.
- A Magnox/EDF synergies group has been established that is examining opportunities to optimise use of existing facilities and reduce the need to build new stores.

1.4 Magnox has confirmed that it is considering burying very low-level waste below ground at the **Trawsfynydd** site³. The waste will be generated from the demolition of the sites cooling ponds and comprises rubble, scrap metal, foundations and soil.

Site director Angharad Raynor stated '*If we were able to transport the material to another site, within the UK, this would mean over 2,000 lorry loads of rubble going across our roads, in our communities.*' Magnox plans to submit an application to the regulators in September 2023 and has committed to engagement with the local community. Any decision on this proposal isn't expected until 2025.

1.5 There have been two significant developments in relation to **Sizewell A**. Firstly, demolition of the Turbine Hall could commence this summer and if so, may be completed by October 2024. It is proposed that the buildings, which pose environmental and safety hazards, would be taken down to 8 metres below ground surface. Around 770 lorry movements will be required to remove all demolition waste, and East Suffolk Council has asked Magnox to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIA) before consent is given.

³ [Nuclear power: Radioactive waste to be buried at Gwynedd plant - BBC News](#)

Magnox is also seeking permission from Suffolk County Council for the importation of up to 10m³ of solid radioactive waste from the former Bradwell Power Station in Essex. The waste will be low level and consists of PPE, plastics and packaging. It would require fewer than 5 van movements per annum.

1.6 A £1billion framework agreement to provide groundworks and concrete structures on the Sellafield site has been awarded to Sir Robert McAlpine⁴. As part of the 17-year agreement, the construction firm has agreed to create opportunities for West Cumbria including the opening a regional office, recruitment of local workers and suppliers, and investment in apprenticeships and training. Director of Civil Engineering Tony Gates commented *'Through this long-term appointment, we intend to make a lasting, positive impact on local communities in West Cumbria by boosting employment, promoting skills and education, working with trusted supply chain partners in the region, and creating a tangible, measurable social impact.'*

2. UK Government update

2.1 The launch of the long-delayed consultation on UK **Decommissioning and Radioactive Substances Policy** appears to have slipped again. At time of going to press there is still no clarity as to when this will emerge and a verbal update will be provided to the meeting. Nuleaf will hold an online meeting on the consultation when it becomes live; and also submit a full response.

2.2 The UK Government has announced that BEIS is to be broken up and a new **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero** has been created⁵. Other new Departments includes those on Science, Innovation and Technology and on Business and Industry.

Grant Schapps, as Secretary of State, and Graham Stuart have transferred to the new Energy Department. Andrew Bowie MP has joined the Departmental Ministerial team and there are strong rumours that he will become the UK's first designated 'Nuclear Energy Minister.'⁶ An update will be provided to Steering Group.

2.3 On the 23rd of January Augean was granted permission by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities⁷ to alter and extend facilities for the recovery, treatment and disposal of low-level radioactive waste at the ENREF facility at **King's Cliffe** in Northamptonshire. The overall amount of LLW disposed of will

⁴ [Sir Robert McAlpine wins £1bn civils framework for Sellafield nuclear site | Ground Engineering \(GE\) \(geplus.co.uk\)](https://www.geplus.co.uk/news/sir-robert-mcalpine-wins-1bn-civils-framework-for-sellafield-nuclear-site)

⁵ [Making government deliver for the British people - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-government-deliver-for-the-british-people)

⁶ [Do not bring nuclear energy plants to Scotland, SNP tells new minister | The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/do-not-bring-nuclear-energy-plants-to-scotland-snp-tells-new-minister)

⁷ [East Northants Resource Management Facility Western Extension development consent decision announced - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/east-northants-resource-management-facility-western-extension-development-consent-decision-announced)

not increase beyond the previously agreed figure of 150,000 tonnes a year, with a requirement to complete landfilling and restoration by the end of 2046. Community benefits are payable on LLW disposed of at the site.

2.4 The **retained EU Law (REUL) (Revocation and Reform) Bill**, currently before Parliament will remove most REUL from UK statute books after 31st December 2023, unless preserved as 'assimilated law', by that date. The Bill has implications for regulations on radioactive substances and nuclear issues. UK Government ministers are understood to be recommending preservation of all REUL so far identified, mainly on the grounds that it implements international obligations.

2.5 The UK Government has asked the **National Infrastructure Commission** to undertake a study on the infrastructure planning system and the best future process for reviewing National Policy Statements (NPS)⁸. The NPSs on Energy, including on Nuclear, are currently under review.

3. Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)

3.1 Developers have submitted six new SMR designs for approval in the UK through the **Generic Design Assessment (GDA)** process⁹. The designs have been developed by the established firms GE-Hitachi and Holtec and by four new companies: X-Energy, Newcleo, UK Atomics and GMET. These companies join Rolls Royce which has already begun the formal GDA process for its SMR design.

3.2 **Solway Community Power Company (SCPC)** has been launched with the aim of securing land in Cumbria for Rolls Royce SMRs and encourage investors in any new nuclear station¹⁰. SCPC is headed by former Sellafield Chief Executive Paul Foster.

3.4 In addition to Rolls Royce, a second company has expressed an interest in developing a SMR at **Trawsfynydd**¹¹. Balfour Beatty has signed a MoU with Holtec to develop plans for a pressurised light water reactor. Along with the Welsh site Oldbury and Heysham have also been identified for possible development.

4. Fusion power

4.1 South Oxfordshire District Council has granted planning permission to General Fusion's **Fusion Demonstration Plant** at the Culham Campus. When construction

⁸ [Infrastructure planning system - NIC](#)

⁹ [SMR developers submit 6 designs for UK approval \(imeche.org\)](#)

¹⁰ [Solway Community Power Company hopes to bring new reactors to Cumbria | News and Star](#)

¹¹ [Second company reveals plans for a new nuclear power plant at Trawsfynydd \(nation.cymru\)](#)

is complete, General Fusion will lease the building from UKAEA. The facility is expected to be commissioned in 2026 and fully operational by early 2027.

The UKAEA's CEO Ian Chapman commented *'The UKAEA welcomes this milestone as it aligns with our strategy to create clusters that accelerate innovation in fusion and related technologies, and support public-private partnerships to thrive.'*

4.2 The UK Government has created a new delivery body for the STEP fusion plant at West Burton in Nottinghamshire. **UK Industrial Fusion Solutions Ltd.** will be a company tasked with taking forward the project until its planned opening in 2040¹².

Professor Sir Ian Chapman, UKAEA Chief Executive, commented *'The establishment of Industrial Fusion Solutions will enable STEP to accelerate its journey towards delivery of electricity from fusion energy to the grid. The new body, which will be formed over the next 18 months, will be established as a programme delivery organisation, driving performance and pace and engaging industry in this endeavour. Alongside the establishment of the new organisation, we are beginning to map out our future skills requirements and, as part of this, we are committing to the development of a STEP Skills Centre at West Burton. This will enable us to provide as many opportunities as possible to people across the area.'*

5. Regulatory Update

5.1 Nuleaf held a well-attended online meeting on **nuclear security issues** on the 7th February. The meeting heard from Dan Hasted, Superintending Inspector Nuclear Security at the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR). He covered a range of relevant areas including the international and domestic regulatory framework; cyber security; drones; and the Energy Security Bill which is currently going through the UK Parliament. A note of the meeting will be circulated shortly.

5.2 Nuleaf's Executive Director has been invited to join an Environment Agency led **Decommissioning and Clean Up Participatory Systems Mapping Project**. Also involving Mott Macdonald and a research consultancy, the aim is to work with stakeholders to develop a proper understanding of the interconnected dimensions to decommissioning and the role of different actors in delivering the sustainable clean-up of legacy sites. An online workshop was held on the 31st January and a further in person meeting is scheduled for the 9th March in Manchester.

5.3 The ONR and their Canadian Counterpart, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) have published the terms of reference for a **Memorandum of Co-operation (MoC)** that will facilitate better working on SMR and AMR technology¹³.

¹² [UK takes major STEP towards near limitless, low-carbon energy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-takes-major-step-towards-near-limitless-low-carbon-energy)

¹³ <https://news.onr.org.uk/2023/01/advanced-modular-reactor-link-up-between-uk-and-canadian-regulators/>

ONR and CNSC will work together on activities relating to water-cooled and non-water-cooled reactors, developing shared technical review approaches, collaborating on pre-licensing activities like design assessment, and participating in discussions about research, training and the development of regulatory approaches to ensure safety in these new reactors.

6. Nuleaf update

6.1 Catherine Draper has announced she will be leaving Nuleaf at the end of May 2023 after 15 years in post. Catherine has done a fantastic job and will be very hard to replace. There will be an opportunity at the March Steering Group meeting for members to offer their thanks to Catherine for all her work.

7. International news

7.1 Nuleaf's Executive Director took part in an online meeting of the extended Steering Committee of **GMF Europe** on the 12th January.

At the meeting, Swedish delegates reported that their newly elected Government has decided to abolish the local safety committees (local fora for engagement) around some nuclear sites. This has left the municipalities there very surprised, especially since the Swedish Government has recently proposed amending legislation to enable a significant expansion of new nuclear power at both existing and new sites¹⁴.

It was also announced that the Swiss municipality of Weiach and the Halden municipality in Norway have joined GMF. The network is in dialogue with local authorities in Estonia and Poland about membership.

Finally, it has been confirmed that:

- GMF will visit a reactor site in Slovakia between the 27th and 29th June.
- The annual IAEA meeting on local engagement in nuclear will be held in the week of the 16th to 20th October and will focus on radioactive waste management.

It is hoped that funding will be available to support some Nuleaf members to attend both events.

¹⁴ [Changes to Swedish law proposed to enable nuclear new build : Nuclear Policies - World Nuclear News \(world-nuclear-news.org\)](https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Changes-to-Swedish-law-proposed-to-enable-nuclear-new-build)