

ITEM 6: UPDATE ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT



Report to RWPG, 31st October 2023

This report provides an update on recent developments in radioactive waste management. It covers:

- NDA Group update;
- UK Government update;
- Nuleaf news;
- Regulatory update;
- AGR Update; and
- International news.

1. NDA Group update

1.1 Philip Matthews attended a Joint **Integrated Waste Management (IWM) and Site Decommissioning and Remediation (SDR) TOG** meeting, via Teams on the 15th September. The meeting included a discussion on progress on the NDA Sustainability Strategy. It was also noted that the process of developing NDA **Strategy 5** was due to commence shortly, and that Nuleaf would be engaged in the process as before.

1.2 Doug Bamsey attended an **NDA Critical Enablers (CE) Theme Overview Group (TOG)** meeting on the 17th of October. Jonathan Cook of Cumberland Council also attended. The key issues discussed at the meeting were:

On Skills, the **National Nuclear Skills Task Force Report** will be published in early December and more work, including with partners will follow in 2024. A commitment was made to give Cumberland Council sight of report and to engage local authorities through Nuleaf in the development of a Skills Plan.

Overall, NDA believes that good progress being made in evolving the strategic workforce plan and in relationship to the Leadership Academy. At the same time there is acknowledgement that there is more to do reaching out to

stakeholders and local partners, with agreement that there is opportunity for local initiatives to complement the national approach.

On **Security and Resilience**, NDA is considering how to assess when operational risks, as sites pass through decommissioning, no longer require existing security measures. They are running a design competition to seek innovation in autonomous systems to determine whether they are viable solution in this context. This approach will then be deployed on lower risk sites to test.

On **Socio-economics**, it was proposed that Nuleaf, Scottish Government and the NDA should hold further discussions on NDA's approach to **Socio-Economics** and the methodology used for assessment.

1.3 Jonathan Cook of Cumberland Council attended a workshop on the **Management of asbestos in the NDA estate**, held via Teams on the 12th October. NDA has been undertaking work since the May 2022 Asbestos Summit and the session aimed to identify any gaps in the NDA's thinking before finalising a Strategic Position Paper. This will then be brought to a TOG for consideration.

Asbestos management is a big issue for the NDA which appears to have the largest inventory of asbestos in the UK. Some of this is radioactive and some is not. In discussion it was noted that:

- LLWR is not a suitable disposal option for majority of asbestos LLW as the friable state of the material makes it hard to meet LLWR acceptance criteria.
- The GDF is the currently assumed disposal option but is not viewed as ideal so alternative options are being examined.
- Commercial disposal options are limited and likely to contract further in future if asbestos management in the wider UK economy becomes a less significant matter over time.
- The supply chain needs continuity of work to invest and remain in market.
- The availability of skills in asbestos management is an issue.
- There is much uncertainty about how much asbestos in total there is and where it is. There is therefore a need for better data to inform planning of decommissioning activity and the availability of disposal routes.
- The NDA may need its own Near Surface Disposal Facility for asbestos. In situ or onsite disposal options will also be explored. If adopted, this will have implications for site end states.

1.4 The consultation on a refresh of the **NDA Socio-economic Strategy** is expected before Christmas, with this running for 12 weeks. Nuleaf will submit a detailed response in consultation with members and will also circulate the consultation when released. On socio-economics, the NDA has also published an online article about a recent visit to various projects in Anglesey and Gwynedd funded by the Agency and Magnox¹.

1.5 It was confirmed on the 2nd October that **Rob Fletcher** has been appointed as the permanent CEO of Magnox having acted in the post since May of this year. It has also been announced that **Chris Train** has taken up the role of interim Chair of NDA.

1.6 John McNamara, NDA's Head of Stakeholder Relations, has taken up a year-long secondment to Great British Nuclear. In his absence it has been confirmed that **Samantha Harris**, Head of Government Relations and Public Affairs, will take over responsibility for stakeholder engagement. Sam and Philip Matthews will meet monthly to discuss NDA and Nuleaf work.

Simon Napper, who has been working as part of the NDA Stakeholder Relations team, has now returned to his previous role with Nuclear Waste Services.

1.7 While no in-person **NDA Stakeholder Summit** will take place this year, it is intended to hold an online meeting before Christmas. Plans for the event are still being finalised and details will be circulated to members when available.

1.8 A skills centre for the UK nuclear industry has been opened at Sellafield. The **Glove Box Training Facility**² will help upskill operators to undertake glove box work, which enables operators to handle hazardous material in a safe and controlled environment.

1.9 The NDA has published their **Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23**³. This provides an update of progress and showcases achievements and case studies.

2. UK Government update

2.1 Nuleaf's Executive Director participated in a meeting of the **Radioactive Substances Policy Group (RSPG)** on the 26th October. The RSPG is the main high-level forum for engagement between the UK and devolved governments and regulators.

¹ [Leaving a sustainable nuclear legacy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/leaving-a-sustainable-nuclear-legacy)

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-training-hub-set-to-revolutionise-nuclear-skills-development>

³ [Nuclear Decommissioning Authority: Annual Report and Accounts 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115444/nuclear-decommissioning-authority-annual-report-and-accounts-2022-to-2023.pdf)

There were two main items on the agenda:

1. The proposed final version of the **Managing Radioactive Substances and Nuclear Decommissioning Policy**. The Policy represents the first substantive review and update of policy in this field in over 25 years and the final version incorporates the Government's response to comments made by Nuleaf and others in the recent consultation.

The updated policy has addressed issues raised by Nuleaf in relation to the siting of a Near Surface Disposal (NSD) facility and in situ disposal. This includes a commitment that a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) should be developed for the NSD to support local authority engagement. At the RSPG, Nuleaf's Director raised the issue of community benefits and a further discussion with DESNZ on this is expected in the coming days. The plan is for the final policy to be published early in 2024.

2. The meeting also discussed the launch of GBN and Government plans related to new nuclear development. In support of GBN's work, DESNZ plans to publish three related documents:

- A roadmap that will set out more information on plans for the delivery of 24GW of new nuclear power. This will include a high-level vision and more information on how they intend to boost skills, support the supply chain, ensure finance and investment, promote effective waste management and decommissioning, etc.
- A consultation on the development of alternative routes to market, to overcome some of the challenges that have been experienced in ensuring sufficient private investment in new nuclear projects.
- A consultation on the proposed approach to siting of new nuclear developments, including SMRs and advanced modular reactors. The intention is to publish this before the end of 2023. This will be followed in 2024 with a draft NPS which it is hoped will lead to the completion of the Parliamentary scrutiny process and the designation of the new nuclear NPS in 2025.

2.2 The recently launched **Great British Nuclear** (GBN) has announced that 6 companies are through to the next stage of the Small Modular Reactor (SMR) competition⁴. EDF, GE-Hitachi Nuclear Energy International LLC, Holtec Britain Limited, NuScale Power, Rolls Royce SMR and Westinghouse Electric Company UK Limited have been selected.

⁴ [Six companies through to next stage of nuclear technology competition - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/six-companies-through-to-next-stage-of-nuclear-technology-competition)
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The designs chosen are considered to be the most able to deliver operational SMRs by the mid-2030s. In the next stage of the process, successful companies will be able to bid for government contracts. The ambition is to announce in Spring 2024 which of the 6 companies the government will support, with contracts awarded by Summer 2024. This timetable aims to make this competition the fastest of its kind in the world.

GBN has also expressed interest in purchasing South Gloucestershire College's technology campus, covering 45 acres on the Berkeley site. GBN has been looking at the potential for SMR development on the Berkeley and Oldbury sites⁵.

3. Nuleaf news

3.1 Nuleaf held a well-attended **Annual Gathering** in Workington on the 6th to 8th September. The event included site visits to Sellafield and the LLWR as well as a Steering Group meeting and dinner. Feedback on the event was received from a number of members. This was very positive and included some suggestions for next year. Feedback and comments will be reported in detail and discussed at the December Steering Group.

Planning is already underway for next years event, likely to be held in June. It has been suggested that North Wales may be a suitable location for the 2024 Gathering, given the 'Lead and Learn' work at the Trawsfynydd site and the funding of a number of innovative socio-economic projects in Gwynedd and Anglesey by NDA/Magnox.

The views of RWPG members on this proposal would be welcome and will feed in to a proposal that will be put to the next Steering Group meeting.

3.2 Nuleaf has engaged former members **Doug Bamsey** and **Steve Smith** to provide policy and engagement support to the network on a consultancy basis. This follows on from a recruitment process for a Senior Policy Adviser which failed to identify a suitable candidate.

Both Doug and Steve bring a wealth of experience and knowledge of local government and nuclear issues. They will attend meetings and provide other support on an ad-hoc basis. This arrangement will initially run until the end of March 2024, when it will be reviewed.

⁵ [Berkeley campus might be bought by Great British Nuclear - BBC News](#)

4. Regulatory update

4.1. The Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) held its **Industry Forum** in London on the 11th October, and Nuleaf's Executive Director attended.

The focus of the meeting was conventional health and safety and cybersecurity. It was noted that there had been two fatalities on nuclear licensed sites in the last year, both related to construction incidents, and so this has been identified as a priority issue for the industry and ONR. The uptick in cyber attacks on public bodies was also highlighted, leading to the prioritisation of action on this issue.

4.2 Steve Smith attended an ONR workshop on **Proportionate Regulatory Control** in Liverpool on the 26th October. A full report will be provided to the next Steering Group meeting.

5. AGR update

6.1 EDF Energy has announced that the defueling of the first of two reactors at **Hunterston B** has been completed on time and on budget, after beginning in May 2022⁶.

Defueling the plant involved removing more than 300 channels of fuel from each of the reactors. The fuel channels will be stripped and processed then taken to the on-site fuel storage pond to cool before being packaged into used fuel flasks and transported via rail to Sellafield.

Work to defuel the other reactor is due to start shortly. EDF said the aim is to have this achieved and all used fuel sent to Sellafield by mid-2025, prior to transfer of site ownership to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority in 2026.

6. International News

6.1 Nuleaf's Executive Director Philip Matthews participated an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) **Technical meeting on the role of municipalities in radioactive waste management**, held in Vienna on the 16th-20th October.

The focus was on the role of local government and communities, and it drew together delegates from across the world to share learning and experiences. Philip was invited to speak on the challenges in defining a community and also Chaired

⁶ [Fuel removed from first Hunterston B reactor : Waste & Recycling - World Nuclear News \(world-nuclear-news.org\)](https://www.world-nuclear-news.org)

and reported on other sessions. All Nuleaf costs for attending the meeting were met by the IAEA.

The visit to Vienna incorporated the **General Assembly of GMF Europe**, which represents municipalities on nuclear issues, and Philip was re-appointed as a Vice President of the organisation.

Further progress was made in building international connections, and GMF Europe/Nuleaf, together with the **Energy Communities Alliance (ECA)**, representing American communities, and the **Canadian Association of Nuclear Host Communities (CANHC)**, signed a Global Partnership agreement to build co-operation on issues of mutual interest.

Finally, Philip and colleagues from Europe and North America met with IAEA **Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi** who later issued a strong commitment to better engagement with local government and communities.