



UK & Ireland NFLA Secretariat

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To Councillors of Aberdeen City Council

Monday 11 December 2023

Dear fellow Councillor,

I am writing to you as Chair of the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities in advance of your Council meeting on Wednesday at which you shall receive a petition which references potential membership of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

I am a Councillor on West Dunbartonshire Council and would be delighted if Aberdeen could join us in membership. Within Scotland, the following authorities are already members:

Dundee, East Ayrshire, Fife, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Midlothian, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, Shetland Islands, West Dunbartonshire, and Western Islands.

These member authorities are active with the work of our NFLA Scotland Forum and within our wider UK / Ireland Steering Committee.

The NFLA Scotland Forum Secretariat is based in Glasgow City Council and our overall UK/Ireland Secretary within Manchester City Council.

I thought it would be useful to provide you with some information about our organisation as you may be unfamiliar with our work.

The NFLAs were established in 1981 after Manchester City Council declared itself the world's first nuclear free local authority.

Forty-two years later, the NFLAs continue to be the primary local authority voice in support of a sustainable energy future for our nation. We support the growth of renewable energy and oppose nuclear power.

In addition to our Scottish Councils, we have affiliated authorities in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland, links with elected members in the Isle of Man, and individual Councillor members.

The NFLAs work on a cross-party basis. Our opposition to nuclear power is rooted in pragmatic reasons:

- **It is simply too costly:** Only one nuclear power station is currently being built – at Hinkley Point C in Somerset. Its current budget is approaching £33 billion, almost double the original estimate, and this is growing exponentially by the day. The next proposed large power station at Sizewell C will come in at a significantly higher cost still. The University of Greenwich estimated as much as £44 billion.

Prospective manufacturers of the much-vaunted Small Modular Reactors claim that their designs will be much cheaper to produce, perhaps £2 billion, but the history of nuclear power is littered with cost overruns and broken promises, and it would be very likely that these plants would cost significantly more.

Future projects will also be funded through a nuclear levy imposed on the bills of every electricity consumer – including those in Scotland; even though Scotland can be self-sufficient in electricity generation, and then some, through renewable sources, and so does NOT need nuclear.

Nuclear electricity currently costs at least twice that of offshore wind to generate, but the cost of nuclear has in recent years been going ever upwards whilst the track for renewables has been down, but even this does not reflect the true cost of nuclear; for the cost of decommissioning plants at the end of their operational lives and dealing with the resultant radioactive waste almost exclusively falls on the taxpayer and not the operator, and it is truly staggering.

The most recent estimate by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority is that expenditure of £260 billion will be required at today's prices to complete the work – but that is based solely on dealing with the existing redundant and operating nuclear fleet and does not account for the redundancy of any built in the future. These costs will almost wholly be met by UK taxpayers, not the industry.

- **It takes too long to build them:** In early 2017, work began at the Hinkley Point C site. The earliest (optimistic) estimate of the date at which the first reactor will be generating is June 2027 (with the second a year later).

French-state owned EDF Energy has however caveated this by indicating that there may be a further delay and has secured permission from the UK Government to move back the date from which they would pay financial penalties for failure to meet contractual deadlines to the early 2030s.

EDF's track record in delivering plants with similar European Pressurised Reactors (EPR) is not good – Olkiluoto 3 in Finland took 14 years to build, was the subject of a bitter and protracted legal dispute between the constructor and operator, and then languished for a further 12 months whilst numerous repairs were fixed; construction at Flamanville 3 in Normandy started in December 2007, and it has yet to become operational.

There is much talk of Small Modular Reactors being the next best thing. But NOT one SMR has yet been built. Despite the hype, in the UK, we are infact at the very earliest stages of SMR development. Six rival designs have just completed the first stage of a competition judged by the newly created Great British Nuclear, with two eventually being shortlisted going through a rigorous three-year-long evaluation process with the Office of Nuclear Regulation. If they are successful only then can that SMR design be deployed in the UK, but they will need further site-specific approvals from the regulators, planners, and minister. We shall not see an SMR before the early 2030s.

Nor will the promise of fusion appear any time soon. Fusion energy has been promised decade after decade since the 1960s, and we are still nowhere near the point where any experiment has generated more electricity than the power employed in the first place to create the experiment. At best we might see something workable by the 2050's, but we might equally see nothing at all.

- **It remains unsafe and uncertain:** The first European Pressurised Reactor (or EPR) built by EDF in China–Taishan-1– was subject to an accident, mostly likely because of parts failure and corrosion. Radioactive gas leaked and the plant was closed-down. Taishan-1 was been closed down again for much of this year.

Olkiluoto-3 was commissioned and then immediately shut down for over a year because of repeated faults with the plant. It has recently again shut down due to a technical fault.

In future decades, British nuclear power plants, new and existing, on coastal sites will be threatened by the ravages of climate change with storm surges, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and water shortages. Modelling has shown that many of the sites will become inundated and isolated. Nor have French reactors based on the nation's rivers fared better; for many have been shut down in summer droughts by a lack of cooling water.

We all know the terrible story of Chernobyl and Fukushima, but failures in safety do not just result in accidents, they also lead to the contamination of the seas, rivers, beaches, land, and atmosphere in and around nuclear plants, with new evidence published in the British Medical Journal indicating that persistent exposure to low-dose radiation leads to an increase in mortality from solid cancers amongst workers in the nuclear industry. If workers suffer, so too must members of any community which hosts, however willingly, a nuclear facility in their midst for decades.

Recent revelations in The Guardian newspapers have alleged that the cybersecurity of Sellafield has been compromised, with the possible installation of malware from foreign states since 2015, and the terrible ongoing war in Ukraine has also thrown in a new and unexpected threat to nuclear plants – that it might become a target and so a potential radiological disaster in time of war. Whether interfered with by an occupied enemy force, attacked by terrorists, subject to an attack of cyber warfare, and simply struck by missiles from a hostile state, the result could be a catastrophic release of radioactive gas, or worse, and, after Chernobyl, sheep farming in Cumbria and Wales was curtailed for decades because of the resultant European-wide atmospheric contamination.

We do not have until the 2050's or even the 2030's to tackle the effects of climate change; we must do it now.

Renewable technologies are proven and improving by the day. Solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, tidal, wave, and hydro can be built far cheaper and far faster than nuclear and without the uncertainties on delivery date or cost, and they can deliver cheaper and sustainable electricity without the costly toxic legacy of dealing with radioactive waste. Dozens of academic and scientific studies have shown that it is possible to deliver sustainable national energy systems using renewables and storage solutions alone, including in the UK.

To the NFLAs, every £ Pound spent on nuclear is a £ Pound diverted from technologies that can deliver now in reducing our carbon emissions, in creating jobs for the people of Scotland, in reducing bills for the people of Scotland, and by helping Scotland and the UK to become truly energy independent.

Consequently, the NFLAs are a strong advocate for renewables and against civil nuclear. We support domestic, community and Council-owned renewable energy projects. We also want to see greater investment in a UK-wide retrospective insulation scheme to make Britain's homes and community-owned buildings warmer, cheaper to run and more energy efficient.

Some of the Scotland-specific issues we have been working on in recent months:

- *Working to re-establish the Scottish Councils' Committee on Radioactive Substances (SCCORS)*
- *Calling for more investment in insulation and energy saving measures.*
- *Seeking the creation of a Scottish national energy provider to build renewable energy capacity for the nation.*
- *Calling for the new Green Freeports to be hubs for the construction of renewable energy technologies, so creating more jobs for the people of Scotland from the expansion of offshore wind.*

- *Calling for stronger measures, greater transparency, and more stakeholder involvement in emergency planning to improve preparedness and the assurance of safety for residents and businesses that would be affected by a nuclear accident (for example, at Torness or Faslane).*
- *Raising concerns about safety on trains carrying nuclear waste on Scotland's railways and on the convoys carrying Trident nuclear missile warheads on Scottish roads to and from Faslane / Coulport.*
- *Calling for more public disclosure and accountability when radioactive particles are discovered on the beaches and shoreline of Dounreay.*
- *Calling on the Scottish Government to create a transition plan for workers in the nuclear power sector as well as for those in the oil and gas sectors.*
- *Seeking more UK Government funding for the shovel-ready Pumped Hydro Storage schemes that will create thousands of new jobs in Scotland.*
- *Working for the safe decommissioning of Britain's redundant nuclear submarines at Rosyth – the NFLAs have historically taken a lead in driving this forward. One of our active Councillors has been appointed the NFLAs spokesperson on the issue, and he has reinvigorated the site stakeholder group with local representatives.*
- *Seeking recognition and compensation for suffering for Scottish nuclear test veterans.*

We work on these, and many other UK-wide issues, on a cross-party basis, responding to formal government, industry, and regulator consultations; writing to Ministers; and sitting on many consultative bodies which meet regularly with nuclear industry regulators, advisors, and enablers at the highest-level, including Ministerial, in both the Scottish and UK Governments.

We also work with European and international partners on issues of common interest, such as nuclear safety and environmental protection, and with local and national campaign groups who oppose new nuclear projects or champion renewables.

Amongst our prestigious output has been a great many publications of a specialist nature, some written by leading academics and scientists, that individuals engaged with the nuclear industry, both for and against, have found to be invaluable, accessible sources of information with a unique perspective.

Member authorities pay an annual subscription which funds our work. This is based on the population size of the authority.

For information about our history and work, please go to our website at <https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/> or please contact our Secretary Richard Outram by email at richard.outram@manchester.gov.uk. (Our UK Secretariat is based in that city).

Richard would be pleased to speak with elected members or officers about our work and is happy to engage in a TEAMS meeting or telephone conference.

Thank you for taking time to read this letter and I do hope that Aberdeen City Council will wish to pursue NFLA membership. We will be very happy to welcome you.

Best wishes,

Labour Councillor Lawrence O'Neill,
West Dunbartonshire Council,
Chair, UK/Ireland NFLAs Steering Committee