16th August, 2012.

Public Consultation on the Disposal of Plutonium

Dear Sir,

We have recently been made aware of yet another consultation process in respect of the nuclear industry: this time one dealing with the plutonium stockpile. We have read and agree with the conclusions and comments contained within the document on the subject compiled by Nuclear Free Local Authorities: their Briefing 34, dated July, 2012.

Yet again, as with every one of the preceding "consultations", we get the feeling that a conclusion has been arrived at, and the consultation is merely a box-ticking exercise. The sheer number of these consultations is daunting, and we have to say that most of them should have been dealt with under more general terms and with wider announcement of their existence. Even so, it is difficult to see how, when a department has issued information and arguments supporting a particular method of dealing with a perceived problem, its leader can be in any way impartial when it comes to making an "independent" decision. In the case of nuclear waste there seems to be a determined attempt to overlook the patently obvious: if you cannot deal with waste and by-products then the first step should be to stop the entire process - not promote its continuance *ad nauseum*, thus compounding the problem and wasting further billions of pounds in a fruitless exercise. Despite ceasing all electrical generation some years ago, Sellafield is still costing billions of pounds each year, just to try and clean up the legacy materials – leastways, those that haven't already escaped or been leaked deliberately to the Irish Sea.

We note also that the NDA are proposing to fund private industry (General Electric - Hitachi) to examine a particular process, when that process has not been developed let alone proved to be effective. Whilst appreciating that the government has a major problem dealing with nuclear waste in all its various forms, we cannot understand how it came to be forced by some clever salesmen into bank-rolling a private foreign company to do research and development which, in the event that it proves viable, will then lead to vast profits for that company at the expense of the British taxpayer. If they want the potential profits then they should surely fund the research and development. The alternative result of the experiment being that the process proves to be yet another costly failure, which the public will nonetheless have to pay the price for while the instigator walks away with improved knowledge and its profits intact. We understand that the nuclear industry is powerful, rich and has lobbyists in key places, but this seems hard to justify.

It is our view that Mr. Cameron was quite correct when he stated that lobbying will be the next major scandal. We look forward to the time when what we see as corruption on a massive scale by the nuclear industry, is subjected to the same examination as, for example, the Murdoch and the banking scandals. We trust that it will not be too long in coming. Our own view is that the presence of, for example, the large number of secondees from Électricité de France *et al* is a prime example of the government being led by the nose to a policy which may well suit and benefit a foreign company and country, but ultimately will be to the detriment and at the expense of the British public. Large commercial organisations are not altruistic by nature, thus it is patently obvious that they will expect - and probably receive - something in return for their investment. That to us is corruption. How many politicians (local and national) and peers have shares in the industry and will benefit from its continuance and expansion? Certainly in Cumbria, the whole expansion programme is being driven by those with allegiance to Sellafield. An investigation into the rôle of those involved is long overdue.

At national level, until such time as the government gets rid of the seconded staff, whom we regard as specially placed moles working on behalf of their employers to gain inside information and to lead the greedy and gullible in government, and those given the task of making decisions do so purely on the evidence available without lobbying from the industry, we will continue to regard the consultation process as a sham.
U.S. company General Electric's Chief Executive Officer, Jeff Immelt, is reported as saying, "*It's just hard to justify nuclear. It's really a gas and wind world today, at some point economics must rule*." When even the head of G.E. announces that nuclear power is too costly, despite having Hitachi as a nuclear engineering and design partner, surely it is time even those in government with a vested interest took note?
The idea that a reactor can consume every part of its own waste is hard to accept. In most cases all that happens is that a smaller quantity of waste is produced but of a much greater radioactive toxicity, rendering it even harder to store and dispose of safely. As the N.F.L.A. suggest, a great deal more information needs to be made available before the proposed process can be given any degree of credence. Until then it is difficult to see what there is to consult about, which returns us to our original comment, that it is just yet another tick-box exercise. No doubt the nuclear industry will have been given advance information and will now have a much clearer view of what they need to do to fight those who disagree. Yet, even before any announcements have been made as to the future development, contracts are apparently being awarded. How strange when the consultations haven't yet been completed.
As with the situation in Cumbria, where a small percentage of the population were telephone-polled using a script over which a pro-nuclear lobbyist had editorial control and thus (unsurprisingly) found a majority in favour of digging a hole somewhere - anywhere - with no further details as to impact, cost, or compensation, or indeed any other basic details upon which an informed decision could be rationally based, your suggestions for dealing with the disposal of plutonium are so imprecise as to be amazingly premature. There is insufficient detail on which anyone can base a decision, so what is the point of holding a consultation exercise before even those basics are known? What are we supposed to be pronouncing upon? Even so, the much-publicised findings of the above-referred to Mori poll did not relate to residents being in favour of nuclear development - merely that an unrepresentative sample had been misled with some cleverly-composed questions set up by pro-Sellafield advocates. One of the questions related to family connections with Sellafield for some reason. That 73% of the parish councils - a much more representative group - were opposed to any development has been ignored. We believe that Cumbria's politics have been seriously corrupted by the nuclear industry.
It seems to be in vogue for government to credit itself for being able to forecast the future, especially when it comes to predicting the cost of disposal of things nuclear and future energy cost. From our point of view, it seems highly unlikely that any of the projected costs of building and commissioning the disposal of nuclear waste - whatever way is ultimately chosen - will be considerate enough to fulfil the government's expectations. Again, the difference between fact and theory will be paid for by the U.K. taxpayer.
In conclusion, although we will be directly affected by the decisions surrounding nuclear development, we have received little information about the multiple "consultations" that have taken place. In most instances we have only learned about them by chance from our contacts. How many people around the country are actually aware of the various changes that have been made to the various pieces of legislation in order to accommodate the industry and understand how each developed site will become a storage area for spent nuclear fuel for decades? We believe that in the interests of openness and honesty much more should be done to ensure that everyone understands the ramifications of the proposed developments.
Sadly, with the industry representatives having the ear of ministers and civil servants such a thing is highly unlikely. If people understood how the proposals will put them and their environment at risk we think there may well be protests on the scale of those currently being seen in Japan. We note the recent findings of environmental and health effects now being announced by scientists in Japan and wonder how, despite the fire and release of radioactive material - accidently and deliberately - there have been no similar effects in Cumbria. Whatever else, making plutonium magically disappear is highly unlikely to happen.
Yours sincerely,