

Draft Speech for Councillor Lawrence O'Neill,  
Chair, UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities

Konnichiwa.

I am Councillor Lawrence O'Neill, elected to serve on West Dunbartonshire Council in Scotland.

I am the Chairperson of the UK / Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

Thank you for inviting me to address this meeting of Mayors for a Nuclear Power Free Japan.

It is a great honour.

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities were delighted to be able to sign a partnership agreement in March 2023 with your organisation to work together against nuclear power in Japan and the United Kingdom.

The NFLAs were first founded in Manchester in 1981.

Our Secretariat is still based in that great city.

We share your concerns about the risks and costs associated with nuclear power and the same central aim which is to oppose it.

We recognise that the future energy needs of both of our nations must be met from power sources which are safe, sustainable, and affordable to our citizens and that are not injurious to our environment.

For sadly we have also seen with the Windscale nuclear pile fire of 1957 in the United Kingdom and the Fukushima nuclear plant accident of 2011 in Japan, how much nuclear power can threaten our people and our planet.

I have been asked to speak a little about the NFLAs work in the UK and in Ireland.

In the UK at present, Britain's operating civil nuclear power fleet consists of one Pressurised Water Reactor at Sizewell B in Suffolk and older Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors in Lancashire and Cleveland, all in England, and at Torness, in Scotland.

These are operated by EDF – Electricité de France – which is now majority owned by the French state.

The aging AGR plants will all close by 2030 as they are increasing off-line because of part failures and as their graphite cores so essential for their safe operation continue irretrievably to decline.

To replace the lost generating capacity, EDF is currently building the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant in Somerset, South-West England.

The former Chief Executive of EDF predicted that British customers would be cooking their turkeys using Hinkley Point C electricity for Christmas 2017!

Some prediction.

Now six Christmas's further on, construction at Hinkley Point C has been mired by a succession of delays and cost overruns.

The plant was expected to cost £18 billion.

But this estimate has now doubled to £35 billion.

But this is an estimate based on 2015 figures.

The figure in 2024 terms would be £46 billion (**or over 8.8 TRILLION YEN**).

And the estimated date of completion has now been pushed back to AT LEAST 2032. 15 years longer than first expected.

But it is highly likely to cost more and take longer still.

As you see the only turkey that has been truly cooked by Hinkley Point C is EDF as they agreed to accept the risks of time delays and cost hikes.

But in the future British taxpayers will not be so fortunate.

Despite Hinkley Point C being a costly and cumbersome nuclear White Elephant, the current government continues to support nuclear power.

UK Ministers recently announced a Civil Nuclear Roadmap, which would triple nuclear power generating capacity in the UK to 24 GW by 2050.

This would include building two large Gigawatt nuclear power plants in addition to Hinkley Point C, and a fleet of so-called Small Modular and Advanced Modular Reactors to compliment them.

The second large plant at Sizewell C, which will be built alongside the Pressurised Water Reactor, will also be constructed by EDF.

This has just received government permission to proceed – what is called the Development Consent Order – and UK Ministers have thrown £1.3 billion at the deal, without securing any funding from the private sector. This is a major hurdle as Sizewell C could cost anything from £30 to £40 billion and quite possibly a lot more.

You will also no doubt have heard that the British Government is also engaged in a competition to select two or three designs for so-called Small Modular Reactors to receive yet more public money so that they can be prefabricated and rolled out to sites across the UK from the early 2030's.

But most of these reactor designs are still drawings on a board and on a computer screen, none have received the necessary approvals from our nuclear and environmental regulators, nor have any actually been built!

It is all a pipe dream with tax-payers money thrown at reactors that are unproven and they may never work.

In the meantime, British domestic energy consumers continue to face high bills and face the impact of climate change with our temperatures and our sea levels rising.

And lastly we have the biggest 'nuclear elephant' in the room – what to do with the UK's radioactive waste.

The British Government has made the controversial decision to opt to build a deep-level forever repository for our legacy and future nuclear waste, including our stockpile of 140 tons of deadly plutonium.

The Government has looked at sites in communities in Cumbria, Yorkshire, and Lincolnshire.

Although this material will be radioactive for 100,000 years, they didn't think to ask people first.

So the news brought out whole communities to oppose them, because they do not want to see their neighbourhoods become a nuclear waste dump.

And who can blame them.

Standing against this nuclear nightmare, for over four decades, the Nuclear Free Local Authorities has been the voice of local authorities opposed to civil nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

Instead, we continue to fight for an energy future based on renewables and for a world without nuclear weapons and in peace.

Local government has a responsibility to promote public safety, preserve the environment, prepare for emergency situations, and inform the public.

The NFLAs in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland work together to influence our nation's policies on  
nuclear power,  
renewable energy,  
radioactive waste management,  
nuclear emergency planning,  
the transport of nuclear materials and  
other pertinent issues, such as the continuing contamination of our seas, land, and air by radioactive discharges from Sellafield and Dounreay.

The NFLA's aims are to  
identify the impact of national nuclear policy on local communities;  
increase local accountability over national nuclear policy;  
work to minimise nuclear hazards and increase public safety;  
and champion the generation of energy using renewables.

We are proud to support local activists and local communities in opposing new nuclear power projects, in seeking to bring forward the closure of aging power plants, in preventing the unwanted nuclear waste dump, and in ending the threat to humanity posed by nuclear weapons.

We are also proud to work with international partners in Japan, Canada, Australia, and Europe to achieve these common goals and to secure for ourselves a clean, sustainable energy future based on renewables and a nuclear weapon free world.

So, I am honoured today to send solidarity greetings from our member NFLA authorities in Scotland, England, Wales, and Ireland, both North and South, to you our partners in Mayors for a Nuclear Power Free Japan. And to wish you every success at this your special conference.