

# The Forum on Stakeholder Confidence

by C. Pescatore\*

**T**he NEA Forum on Stakeholder Confidence (FSC) meets regularly to share experience about the societal dimension of radioactive waste management. It fosters learning about stakeholder dialogue, reflection about improving decision-making processes, and the search for ways to develop shared societal confidence, consent and approval of management solutions. The FSC brings together operators, regulators, researchers and government decision makers from 16 countries.

Recently, the FSC has explored means of communicating about safety through the use of “analogues” – examples drawn from nature or from man-made constructions – which can help all stakeholders to grasp, and regulators to assess, the technological arrangements proposed for handling radioactive waste. An FSC topical session was held on 4 June 2007 on the use of analogues to help understand and to build confidence in radioactive waste management approaches and safety cases. Case studies were presented from Finland, Spain and Switzerland and from joint international endeavours (EC projects NANET and PAMINA). Timescales relevant to long-term safety of waste disposal in a geological repository (on the order of several centuries, millennia and sometimes more) cannot be attained in experiments. Regulators need a technical demonstration to aid in evaluating the arrangements put forward by the implementer in the formal safety case. Political decision makers and local stakeholders appreciate the opportunity

to visualise technological solutions. In both cases, demonstration can add to confidence in the feasibility of such solutions. An example may be given of comparing earthquake damage in a mine with possible damage in a geological repository when affected by a similar event. This situation, which corresponds to a high degree with the modelling and engineering applications expected in a geological repository, serves as a contemporary analogue. As such, it provides very valuable input for the design of underground structures and their supports.

In parallel, the FSC has looked into what can be called the “symbolic dimension” of radioactive waste management. The FSC intends to become better aware of “symbolic” meanings (i.e., meanings that, for different groups, may resonate beyond the obvious) in their actions. Deep-seated values and norms, knowledge and beliefs, group identification, cultural tradition and self-interest are some examples of factors that shape perceptions and interpretations. FSC members want their behaviour, decisions and writing to be highly coherent with the societal values embodied in waste management endeavours. Awareness of additional dimensions of meaning beyond dictionary definitions, and recognition that dialogue is shaped by more than just concrete realities, may help to find ways of creating non-confrontational and constructive relationships between institutional actors and civil society. On 5 June 2008 the FSC held a topical session on this theme. The ensuing report [NEA/RWM/FSC(2008)5/REV2] explains the concepts and includes illustrations of how nuclear installations have changed meaning over the years. Of particular interest is the changing view of waste management facilities that comes about when local partnerships are formed between

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implementers and civil society representatives with the mission to define an integrated, socio-technical design concept.

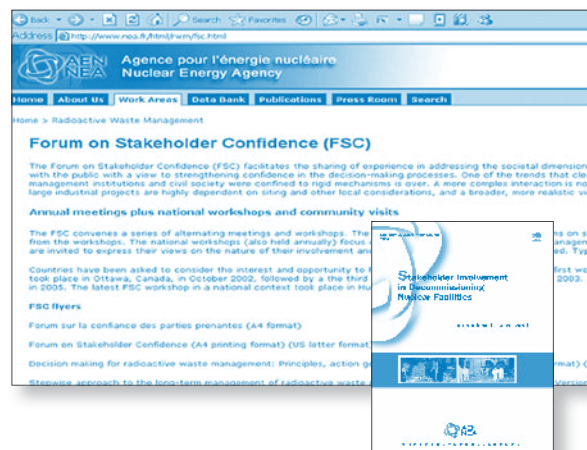
With its national workshops and community visits, the FSC provides a setting for direct exchange among stakeholders of many backgrounds, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and learning. The seventh FSC workshop was held in early April 2009 in the east of France, in the Meuse/Haute-Marne region. This area currently hosts the Bure underground laboratory (created by French law to pursue research on the geological disposal solution for the management of high-level and long-lived radioactive wastes). In 2006, Parliament approved the principle of constructing a reversible waste repository targeting operation, if authorised, in 2025. The process of selecting the exact location within the area is under way. The FSC workshop entitled “Repository Project and Territories” brought together the potential host communities to exchange views with international delegates on the issues raised by such a project. The workshop was attended by 90 people including six mayors and seven municipal representatives.

One session was dedicated to the review of the historical developments and national framework of the French national programme for the final management of long-lived, high- and medium-level radioactive waste. Three themes were then explored in more detail: local information, reversibility, environmental monitoring and memory of a long-term installation. Each theme was first addressed through a few brief presentations representing various viewpoints and sensibilities, and later discussed by all participants subdivided in small groups.

The workshop was assisted by the Local Committee for Information and Oversight (CLIS), a major actor in the French framework representing

and informing all of civil society in the geographical area where a final disposal facility may be located. Logistic and financial support was provided by Andra, the national waste management agency which is a permanent member of the Forum on Stakeholder Confidence.

The NEA will publish the proceedings of the workshop in due course. They will include summaries of all stakeholder speeches and the outcomes of the discussions. The publication will serve to benchmark best practices and to archive history and progress to date. It should also become a useful document to distribute when receiving queries about relevant aspects of the French radioactive waste management programme.



FSC flyers and publications, including the proceedings of the events mentioned above and the programme of the French workshop, are made available at [www.nea.fr/html/rwm/fsc.html](http://www.nea.fr/html/rwm/fsc.html). They will be of interest to all those dealing with socio-technical decision making. ■