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COSLA wants study of nuclear waste plan

By DAVID SCOTT, Local Government Correspondent

SCOTTISH local authorities are to call for a wide-ranging public inquiry into proposals for the dumping of nuclear waste at the Atomic Energy Authority's plant at Dounreay in Caithness.

Council representatives attending a meeting of the planning committee of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in Edinburgh yesterday warned that the proposals by the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive would not be accepted either in the Highlands or in the rest of Scotland.

The chairman, Councillor Alex Sharp, of Fife, said, "We don't want this waste in the Scottish Highlands. We don't want this waste in Scotland. The remoteness and inaccessibility of Dounreay and the associated

transport difficulties of transferring waste to this site raises questions about the technical basis of this decision."

He believed it had been a political, rather than a practical, decision. Another member of the committee, Councillor Angus Graham, planning development chairman of the Western Isles, said NIREX would find the waste would not easily be dumped in the Highlands and he predicted that thousands upon thousands of people would do everything in their power to prevent it.

Mr Graham said, "We don't want their jobs or their bribes in the form of community centres or playing fields. We don't want their waste. We want a serious look at the whole question of nuclear waste in Britain."

The planning committee's decision to reject emphatically the proposal and urge the Scottish Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, to hold a public inquiry, follows its consideration of a recommendation by NIREX that Dounreay should be considered as one of two possible sites for the deep disposal of solid low and intermediate-level radioactive waste. The alternative site is on land owned by British Nuclear Fuels at Sellafield in Cumbria.

Voicing doubts about the effectiveness of COSLA's opposition to nuclear dumping so far, Mr Graham said it was clear that a political game was being played and he added, "I think we are going along

with it and we should not be going along with it. . . ." He said COSLA "should not be prepared to go along with this farce any longer."

A close look at the NIREX report gave the impression that it had been written by a public relations company rather than by serious technical experts, said Mr Graham. There was a need to look at the transport issues, which were of great concern to the local authorities.

He went on, "All I can say is that the feeling I have got is that they will not easily dump waste in the Highlands of Scotland and that message should go to NIREX."

The committee was told that a planning application by the UK

Atomic Energy Authority for the drilling of two deep test bore holes at Dounreay is to be considered by the Highland Regional Council planning committee next month. Grampian Regional Council has already urged Mr Rifkind to establish a joint planning inquiry commission.

A report by the COSLA secretariat said it might appear that the Dounreay location would affect only certain authorities in Scotland. But it gave warning that the transport option finally selected might have a significant impact on other areas.

"There are undoubtedly very real concerns about the major transport implications which could arise from the development of a repository in Dounreay."

The report recalls that more than

2,500 responses had been received by NIREX discussion panels seeking constructive comments on the task of ensuring the waste was managed safely. A document published by NIREX last month, detailing the reaction had already been published by the local authority support of deep disposal, as well as support for continued nuclear sites where a waste was created.

Mr Sharp said the proposals for some ways similar to those often arise over the sites for travelling public transport as long as it is acceptable as long as it is acceptable. What we are not doing is to say we don't want it in our public inquiry."