



10th National Workshop of the Forum on Stakeholder Confidence

7-9 September 2016, Bern, Switzerland

“Bridging Gaps – Developing Sustainable Intergenerational Decision Making in Radioactive Waste Management”

Purpose

The primary purpose of the workshop was to gather Swiss stakeholders and other international participants to discuss sustainable intergenerational decision making in radioactive waste management in an open dialogue, and in an atmosphere of mutual respect and learning.

Goal

The aim of the workshop was to identify issues that could be further explored by Switzerland and other participating countries so as to address the differences in the level of knowledge and the level of participation

between generations, thus “bridging gaps” from current stakeholders to future stakeholders.

Description of the national process

Switzerland has a nuclear power programme and intends to responsibly dispose of radioactive waste in a deep geological repository. The Swiss national framework gives clear roles and responsibilities to all engaged stakeholders. The decision-making process is well defined and respected. Local participation is managed thanks to regional conferences active in all siting regions.



The central question of the workshop:

What can we do today to make sustainable decisions that can be understood and accepted by the next generation, while providing them with enough flexibility to make their own decisions if new circumstances arise?

Observations:

1. Multiple gaps to be bridged were identified during the workshop:
 - Between experts and the public, both of which are very involved in the process.
 - Between informed and uninformed people. Public participation does not guarantee that people are informed.
 - Between generations.
2. Swiss stakeholders have good knowledge of the decision-making process related to the sectoral plan.

Knowledge is not the same as information

Knowledge is necessary to fully understand decisions and decision-making processes. Information provided to stakeholders without context is of little use. Sustainable decision-making processes must include a combination of knowledge and information, and a broad range of this knowledge and information should be preserved to enable later generations to make decisions and judgements. It is important to build competencies among local communities in order to enable them to have an active role.

Considering that international borders could change in the future and that the management of nuclear waste transgresses country borders, it is also important for international organisations to keep records of data.

“Current knowledge and resources, and the strength of ongoing research efforts, should not be underestimated. It cannot simply be hoped that future generations will be more clever.”

Intergenerational outreach to youth is an important part of sustaining decisions

Key considerations:

- Youth should be empowered with the idea of being change makers.
- Communications tools and content should be tailored to the situation to be able to effectively reach future generations.
- Youth and future generations must be involved because they will be taking responsibility for radioactive waste management in the future.
- Each decision should take into consideration the impact on future generations.
- The next generation should have the flexibility to change decisions made today using the same decision-making process that currently exists.
- Acceptance cannot be obtained from *everyone*. The goal should be to gain the highest level of acceptance possible, so that the methods used to reach decisions concerning radioactive waste management are discernible and are accessible to future generations.

**A topic for future studies:
Who will decide how and what
information should be preserved?**



Through its initiatives, the NEA Forum on Stakeholder Confidence (FSC) contributes to a new approach to decision making on the management of radioactive waste. The opportunity to hold an FSC workshop and community visit is an example of the services provided by the Forum to member countries. FSC workshops and site visits have proven to be constructive in fostering national dialogue and helping frame the issues that stakeholders wish to see considered. The FSC takes up all proposed themes in a spirit of openness and service to member countries.

The FSC provides national workshops as an opportunity and method for mutual learning and constructive dialogue. These events are a platform for direct exchange among stakeholders in an environment of respect and mutual learning. For the host country participants, FSC workshops are an opportunity to present and analyse their own experience in a neutral setting, to benefit from international feedback and to leave a written record of their viewpoints.

A broad range of themes have been discussed at the past nine workshops, including stepwise decision-making (Finland), local and national considerations in the restoration of contaminated sites (Canada), the methodology of local partnerships (Belgium), site selection procedures (Germany, Czech Republic), the interaction between stakeholders at the local and national levels (Spain), added value, regional development and the support received by local communities (Hungary, Sweden, France), and organising the reversibility of decisions and retrievability of waste (France).