

# Nuclear community's message to UN Environment

03 November 2017

**World Nuclear Association asks UN Environment to join other leading international bodies in recognising that nuclear energy is an important part of the solution to climate change. We hope to see nuclear energy represented alongside renewables in future UN Environment dialogues on clean energy, innovation and sustainable development, writes Agneta Rising.**

On 30 October, The Australian newspaper ran an article 'UN Energy Forum Excludes Nuclear' that was followed the next day by one in Forbes, 'Sustainable Innovation Forum (SIF17) Rejects World Nuclear Association Sponsorship'. There was also subsequent media coverage describing how UN Environment had ultimately rejected our offer to sponsor the *Sustainable Innovation Forum*, which takes place alongside the annual climate change COP talks in November. As the voice of the global nuclear industry, we wish to take this opportunity to make our position clear.

UN Environment states it is respected as the "leading global environmental authority", which implements "the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system" and which plays an influential role in advocating policy options to national governments. So, how can it in good conscience continue to downplay and largely ignore nuclear energy - the world's second largest and most readily scalable low-carbon electricity source - and nuclear technology in general, which contributes to at least nine of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals?

Media coverage presented this quote from a UN Environment spokesperson:

“We prioritise the renewables revolution, such as wind and solar energy, as well as encouraging the ongoing shift from fossil fuel. Our work on the nuclear sector is limited.”

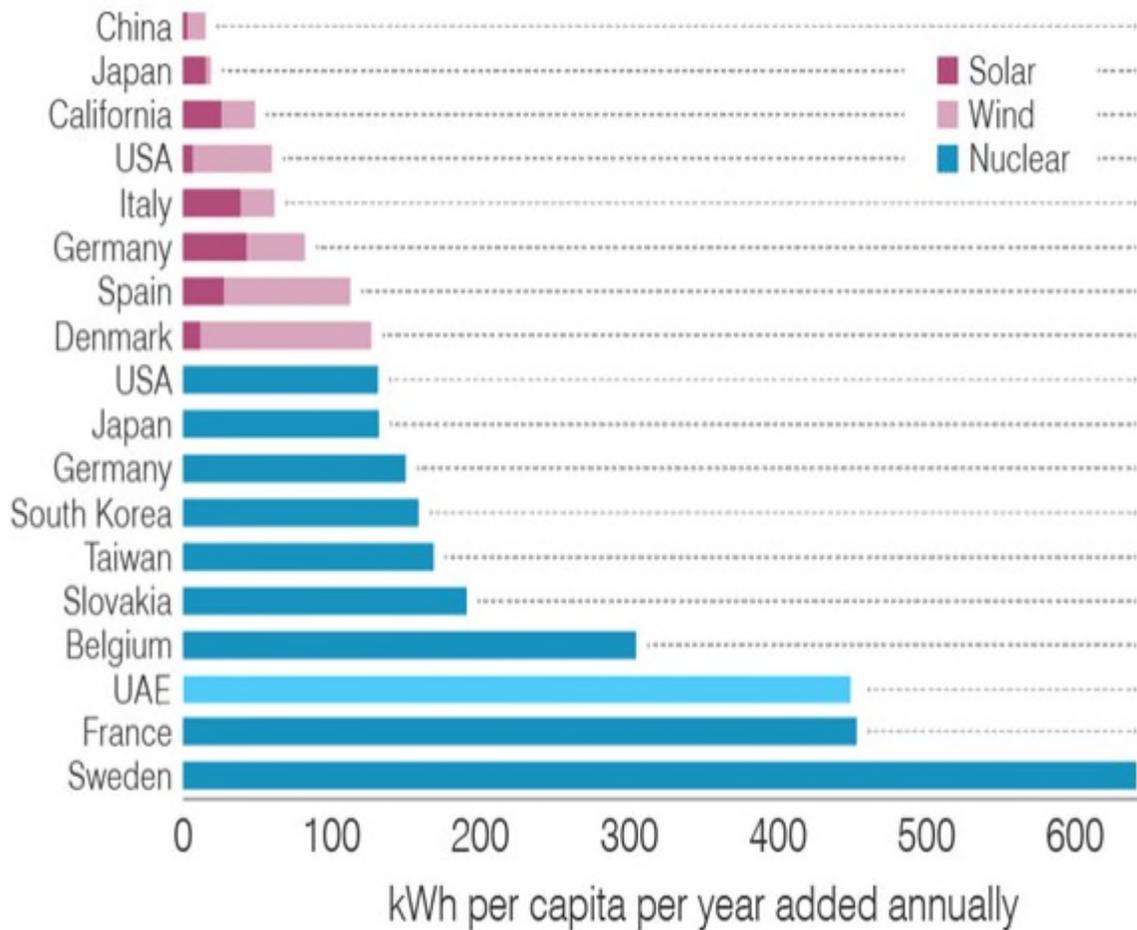
Preventing greater than two degrees of temperature rise remains an urgent problem which the world is simply not currently on track to solving. At the same time as resolving to cut back emissions, many countries are industrialising and trying to improve the quality of life of their citizens. Worldwide, energy demand is steadily growing and the percentage of fossils fuels in final energy consumption has barely shifted for over 15 years.

The International Energy Agency's (IEA) 2-degree scenario is arguably the most widely recognised official pathway by which the planet might avoid excessive warming. It requires that, by 2050, nuclear energy provides one of the largest contributions to electricity of any energy source. In June, the IEA noted that high-level support was essential for nuclear to grow and reach these targets.

Just this week, at the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) *Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Power in the 21st Century* (another high-level UN conference), the Agency's director general, Yukiya Amano, stated: "Clearly, the pace of construction of new nuclear power plants will need to be stepped up if the world's future energy needs, as well as climate change goals, are to be met. It is difficult to see other low-carbon energy sources growing sufficiently to take up the slack if nuclear power use fails to grow."

World Nuclear Association has long been concerned by the slow growth of nuclear energy globally as well as the discordance that exists between high-level policy bodies on nuclear energy, with some not recognising the role the technology needs to play if climate and development priorities are to be successfully balanced. For this reason, we launched the Harmony programme in 2015.

Harmony envisions a diverse mix of low-carbon generating technologies deployed in such a manner that the benefits of each are maximised while the negative impacts are minimised. We believe that this requires nuclear energy to provide at least 25% of electricity by 2050. The remainder could still be made up by renewables and other low-carbon technologies. The Harmony vision is fundamentally inclusive and practical in nature, requiring the global nuclear industry only to match the maximum build rate achieved during the 1980s.



*Nuclear makes quick and lasting decarbonisation possible (Source: Cao et al, Science, August 2016)*

We sought to support the *Sustainable Innovation Forum* because we believe that, going forward, a meaningful dialogue needs to develop between the global nuclear community and UN Environment. There are also some fantastic innovative new technologies being offered by our member companies which we wanted to showcase to important international delegates. We were willing to make an investment to bring some much-needed UN attention to these vital issues. Many people perhaps don't realise that it is very difficult to get onto the agenda of such a conference.

World Nuclear Association is already UN accredited and takes part in IAEA meetings regularly. We are also an official observer at UNFCCC COP meetings. With a new leader at UN Environment's helm and given the practical arrangement it signed with the IAEA in 2015, we were convinced that that the time was right for this important outreach. We were also buoyed by the success of one of our members, Terrestrial Energy, in becoming sponsors last year of another UN Environment conference - the *Sustainable Investment Forum*.

We remain ready and willing to represent nuclear energy at UN Environment events and to take part in its clean energy and technology discussions in the future.

*Agneta Rising is the director general of World Nuclear Association.*

**Comments?** Send them to: [editor@world-nuclear.org](mailto:editor@world-nuclear.org)

## **UN Environment Program Rejects WNAs Money. Won't Allow Sponsorship Of Sustainable Innovation Forum (SIF17)**

<https://atomicinsights.com/un-environment-program-rejects-wnas-money-wont-allow-sponsorship-sustainable-innovation-forum-sif17/>

November 7, 2017 By Rod Adams [Leave a Comment](#)

The UN Environmental Program (UNEP) has rejected the World Nuclear Association's (WNA) offer to provide financial support to the 8th Annual Sustainable Innovation Forum (SIF).

[Described by its chairman](#) as the “[largest business-focused side event during the annual Conference Of Parties](#)” the event is scheduled to take place alongside COP23 in Bonn, Germany. Originally accepted as a gold sponsor and ready to pay the £40,000 (\$68,338) fee, WNA was recently notified that its sponsorship had been rescinded upon intervention by the UN Environment Program (UNEP).

The original rejection was accompanied by a tentative offer for a lesser sponsorship that did not include any branding or overt credit, but even that offer was later vetoed by the UNEP.

UNEP, an organization [whose mission](#) is ‘To provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations’ will not even take the nuclear industry’s money and allow it to explain how its technology could contribute to an enhanced accomplishment of that mission.

As reported in an article published in The Australian titled [UN accused of bias as energy forum excludes nuclear](#) Naysán Sahba, a spokesman for UNEP, explained the decision as follows.

“We prioritise the renewables revolution, such as wind and solar energy, as well as encouraging the ongoing shift from fossil fuel,” Mr Sahba said.

“Our work on the nuclear sector is limited.”

That position employs specious logic. No one was asking the UNEP to stop promoting wind and solar or even to explain to anyone why nuclear energy should or should not be considered as a clean energy technology. However, no one at WNA was expecting such a firm rejection from an organization that has long recognized the immediate need to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> production from energy.

By making a financial commitment to sponsor SIF17 in Bonn, the nuclear industry was trying to follow the lead of industrial organizations like BMW and Toyota, two of the world’s largest producers of automobiles driven by internal combustion engines burning gasoline, Orsted, a utility that continues to operate coal fired power stations and Deutsche Post DHL Group, a logistics company that operates fleets of aircraft and trucks.

All four of those organizations are headline or gold level sponsors of the 2017 Sustainable Innovation Forum.

Perhaps part of the problem is that the World Nuclear Association does not have a conversion story to share about how it has seen the light and decided to redirect its fossil fuel focus to stop burning stuff in a few decades.

Instead, the organization represents an industry that has been specializing in producing energy with a minimum level of CO<sub>2</sub> and other polluting by-products for more than 50 years.

David Hess, a policy analyst and communication manager for WNA, expressed his organization’s deep disappointment at being rejected from conference sponsorship. They were looking forward to the opportunity to be in a room full of serious people talking about effective ways of addressing some of the world’s most pressing problems.

Ben Heard, the executive director of [Bright New World](#), a climate and energy focused NGO, told The Australian that he was gobsmacked to see such a blatant example of bias and prejudice.

“I’m an advocate for this technology on environmental grounds but it struggles, and part of the reason is time after time it faces this kind of institutional bias which means no-one can even have a conversation about it.”

When contacted, Heard acknowledged that some participants in the event might have been uncomfortable confronting evidence supporting the disturbing notion that nuclear energy is clean. He emphasized the importance of accepting new ways of thinking.

“If institutions cannot deal with even this small amount of discomfort, we have no chance of coming together to resolve a challenge like climate change.”

[Mathijs Beckers](#), a Dutch author of several climate and energy books, made the following observation.

“Our leaders are pretending to work on a solution to poverty and climate change, but they are still considering useless shiny things at the boutique, while the real solutions lie in the hardware store.”

Eric Meyer, the Founder and Executive Director of [Generation Atomic](#), an NGO founded by millennials deeply concerned about the world they are inheriting made the following observation.

“With nuclear energy, we actually have a shot at decarbonizing in time—France, Sweden, and Ontario have demonstrated this. For now, it appears that we live in a world where politics and fear trump facts and science, even at the UNEP. We must work to change that, before it’s too late.”

The world’s need for abundant clean energy is too pressing to address it from predetermined positions that prevent thorough consideration of all available technologies.

Kirsty Gogan, [co-founder and Global Director of Energy for Humanity](#) provided her observations on the UNEP’s decision to exclude nuclear energy’s global trade group.

“UNEP have exposed an institutional bias that is nothing to do with solving environmental problems, and everything to do with marketing pet technologies.

“Nuclear energy is the only proven way to transition from coal to clean electricity generation. Nuclear energy has problems with high costs and low public confidence, but without it, there is an even greater risk that we will miss our climate targets.

“This is why anyone who cares about solving climate change should be insisting that nuclear come to the table to explain how the industry intends to step up to drive down costs and build public confidence. But instead, by blocking nuclear from the conversation, and insisting on a conditional, renewables-only, response to climate change, UNEP have displayed a dangerous ideological agenda that undermines their own credibility.

“If the UNEP lacks the courage and conviction to tackle these difficult conversations, even at the risk of annoying the antinuclear greens, what chance do we have of stepping up to solve climate?”

It’s quite short-sighted for an organization claiming to be a global leader for a cleaner environment and a more equitable distribution of life-enhancing energy resources to silence discussion of nuclear energy.

*Disclosure: Rod Adams was a founding member of the Generation Atomic Board of Directors.*

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*A version of the above was first published on Forbes.com. It is republished here with permission.*