

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Commissioner David A. Wright
NEA Stakeholder Involvement Workshop
December 14, 2022

Good afternoon—or good morning—depending on where you are, and thank you for the introduction. It's an honor to be with you today to share some thoughts with you about the importance of stakeholder engagement and the role it plays in helping reach the best decision you can, a decision that is made in a fully informed and inclusive environment.

Before I go any further, I must make sure you know and understand that the comments I make today are my own and do not represent the NRC as a whole. So, with that disclaimer, let me proceed.

In the few minutes I have today I'd like to discuss the importance of stakeholder involvement in decision-making, specifically in the world of nuclear power. First, let me state the obvious—leaders lead—at least that's what they should do. Which means they also have to make choices and decisions, some of which are hard choices and can be difficult.

Let me give you another leadership truth: not everyone is going to be happy with the decisions you make, no matter how hard you try. My team knows that my leadership style includes lots of interaction like walking around, talking with, and listening to staff and others face-to-face about where they work and live every day. I want to learn about them and learn from them, and even more importantly, understand them because I believe it helps me.

In order to lead effectively, I believe you have got to know who you are leading and why. Part of being a successful leader is in making solid, well-founded, and well-informed decisions, knowing what goes into that process and why. A leader should boil things down to an understanding of what they are actually being asked to decide and why. Part of that process involves history and understanding what has led to the need for the decision to be made. Put another way: how can you understand where you need to go, unless you understand how you got to where you are now?

In my experience as a safety regulator, as a former elected official and as a state public utility economic regulator, I have experienced the significant value that comes from engaging with stakeholders in the decision-making process, *and* I have also seen how decisions can

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suffer when stakeholder input and information is neither sought nor valued. As a nuclear regulator, it is vital that we engage with operators, utilities, and essentially anyone in the industry, as well as with those who will be impacted by our decisions as we go through the process of making decisions. Whether the decision is a safety-related decision being made by an independent regulator like the NRC or an operational or business decision being made in a utility board room, it's important to know, understand, and engage with the stakeholders that may be affected by the decision you are having to make. In the end, whether they agree with the final decision or not, including them, considering their positions and what they have to say will make for a more informed and well-rounded decision.

The NRC is committed to fostering open and productive relationships with our stakeholders. We have a policy on public engagement and recently updated it last year to reinforce our commitment to openness and transparency. The organizational values that guide the NRC in our regulatory activities and decision-making are outlined in our Principles of Good Regulation. One of those principles is Openness. That's because nuclear regulation is the public's business and so our communications and decision-making must be transacted publicly and candidly. In fact, the public must be informed about, and have the opportunity to participate in the regulatory processes as required by our laws.

I'm certain there are businesses and organizations out there that are not required to hear from a wide variety of stakeholders or involve and listen to those who may have differing opinions or positions. But I am just as certain that successful organizations and businesses know their "market" or "audience" and understand that you can't make a complete decision—or develop a holistic solution to any problem—unless you are open to listening to, engaging with, and understanding the concerns and views from all stakeholders that may be impacted by the decision you are being called on to make.

As leaders who must make decisions, we need to understand alternate views and diverse thoughts in order to develop an optimal strategy and solution that will address a potential problem. We may not fully agree or align with those having other views, but listening,

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being open, transparent, and communicative can help get the buy-in needed for a sustainable long-term path forward. In other words, it can make it easier on you.

Decisions are never black or white. Many times, there are multiple ways to solve an issue or make a decision, and they are all good. They can be all right also. But you can only go with one; the one you believe is best in that moment and at that time. But that also means the options you do not go with may not meet with the approval or acceptance of all stakeholders.

For instance, using the nuclear sector as an example, it'll be a challenge for nuclear power to succeed as a viable strategy to address climate and energy needs if the public is not supportive, or if the public feels their concerns are not being appropriately heard or addressed—whether that's during the front end on mining and fuel fabrication, construction, operation, or the backend of the fuel cycle.

A good recipe for successful stakeholder engagement in policy decision-making requires lots of ingredients but I only have time to share a few. They would be:

- *awareness and competence,*
- *accountability and commitment, and*
- *authenticity and consistency.*

Whatever decision we are being asked to make, we should know our market and our stakeholders, and that means also being aware of concerns and issues important to stakeholders and being able to competently speak to them.

We need to be committed to engaging and addressing our stakeholders and if we don't see eye to eye, we seek to understand why they feel the way they do, even if we still agree to disagree in the end. Accountability means a leader should always be open to listening to members of the public, regardless of when the interaction may occur, because that's who we serve. A good and accountable leader will also know their audience and will be prepared to answer questions with factually accurate information – free from emotion. Sometimes though, you may find that it may be best not to engage, and good leaders know when that is, too.

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Usually that might be with someone who is so passionately dug in on their position or view, that it is not possible to have a constructive dialogue with them. It's unfortunate, but we've all experienced people and times like that.

And lastly, we should be authentic in speaking about the issues surrounding the decisions we are being asked to make; be consistent in our messaging; and transparent in how, when, and where stakeholder input is collected, and how it is to be managed and responded to.

The “*word ingredients*” I just mentioned are just some of the ingredients available to you to create a recipe for a great decision-making meal and help you establish and maintain the trust you will need to have sustainable success as a policy maker, a decision maker and a leader.

I'd like to close by saying that if the ultimate goal is to reach a sustainable, transparent and widely accepted decision-making process then, first, we must look at our role as the decision maker and ask: *How transparent and transformative are we in providing access and opportunity to stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process within the laws, boundaries and guidelines that govern us?*

We must be aware, competent, accountable, committed, authentic, and consistent in the communications we have with our stakeholders, regardless of their position, in order to maintain the trust we work so hard at building in the communities that we serve and who depend on us.

With that, let me close by saying thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and that myself and each member of my team are only a phone call or an email away if we can be of service to you. Please don't hesitate to reach out if there's an issue that you'd like to discuss. I appreciate your kind attention today, and I look forward to your questions.