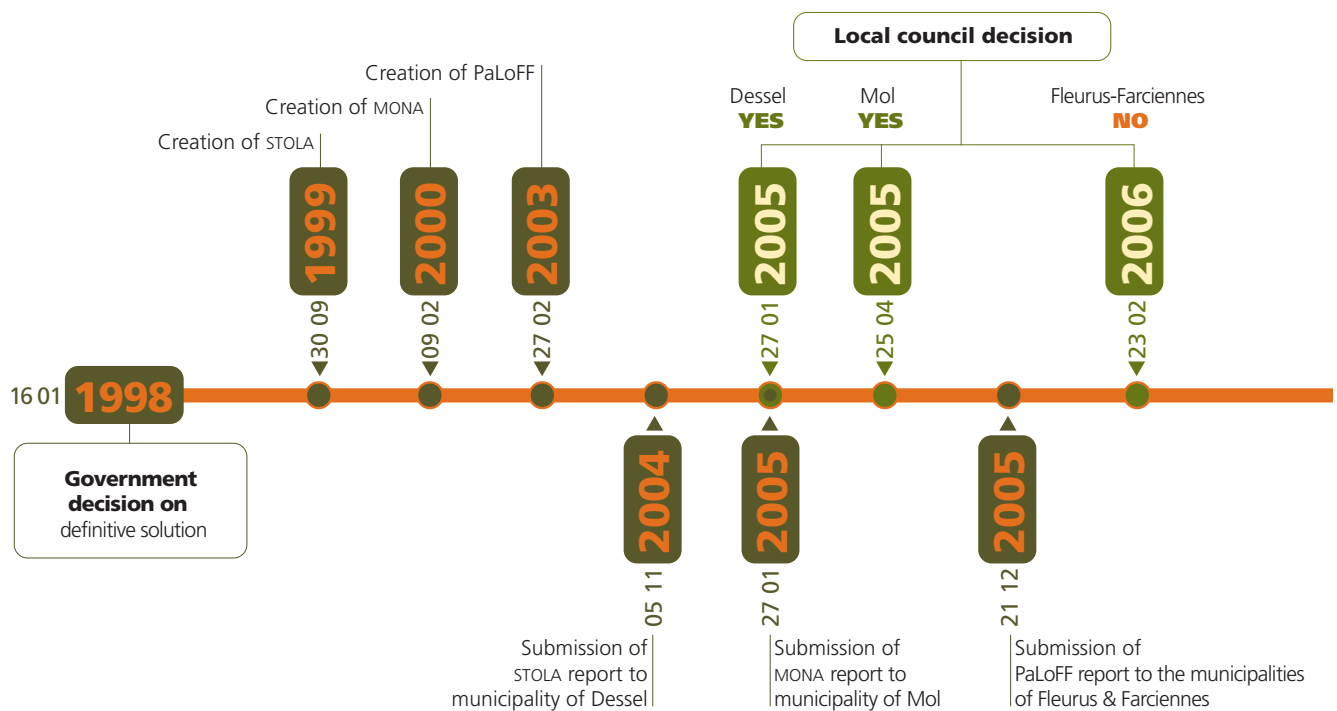


Disposal of category A waste – from studies to preliminary design

From its creation in 1980, ONDRAF/NIRAS has studied the possibilities for the disposal of radioactive waste. This has not been easy. Especially since according to public opinion the issue was not open to discussion. From 1998 ONDRAF/NIRAS opted for the participation of the population in the municipalities where a disposal installation might be established. This has led to a unique approach in which all aspects and conditions were studied through active cooperation: the local partnerships.



An integrated projet for the surface disposal
in Dessel of the Belgian low and
medium-level short-lived waste

Together we can make it possible

1985-1997: explorative studies

Initially ONDRAF/NIRAS only studied the disposal possibilities from a scientific and technical point of view. Research was focused on the safety and the feasibility of a disposal system. Because of the general resistance it encountered, it had absolutely no prospect of constructing a disposal installation in Belgium.

1998-2006: societal approach

In its decision of 16 January 1998 the government commissioned ONDRAF/NIRAS to continue working towards a definitive solution, but to limit its research to existing nuclear zones and zones where the local authorities showed an interest. It also had to develop the necessary consultation structures to incorporate a disposal project at a local level.

ONDRAF/NIRAS then reconsidered its approach. It turned away from the classical engineering approach that it had taken until then and replaced it with a participative approach. The concerns about safety, the environment and health and the wishes of the inhabitants of the municipalities came first.



Three partnerships

The ONDRAF/NIRAS proposal led to the establishment of three local partnerships:

- STOLA-Dessel (Study and consultation group on low-level waste): partnership between the municipality of Dessel and ONDRAF/NIRAS
- MONA (Mol consultation on nuclear category A waste): partnership between the municipality of Mol and ONDRAF/NIRAS
- PaLoFF (Local Partnership Fleurus–Farciennes): partnership between the municipalities of Fleurus and Farciennes and ONDRAF/NIRAS

Each partnership was given the task of developing an integrated preliminary design: a disposal installation coupled to a set of conditions that cannot be separated. The conditions concern safety, the environment, health, control, quality of life and permanent participation, also for all future generations.

The local partnerships developed integrated preliminary designs

Together with ONDRAF/NIRAS, STOLA-Dessel in Dessel, MONA in Mol and PaLoFF in Fleurus-Farciennes worked on the development of one or more integrated preliminary designs for the disposal of category A waste in their municipality.

By 2006, the three partnerships had developed a total of five integrated preliminary designs for disposal. These were submitted for approval to the councils of the municipalities concerned. The municipalities of Dessel and Mol accepted the preliminary designs of their partnerships, subject to fulfilling the conditions linked to their preliminary designs. The preliminary design from PaLoFF was ended as a result of the decisions by the councils of the municipalities of Fleurus and Farciennes to withdraw from the project.

According to ONDRAF/NIRAS, the preliminary designs fulfilled the conditions that the Council of Ministers had specified in its decision of 16 January 1998 and its financing could be guaranteed by means of suitable financing mechanisms.

The integrated preliminary designs were then submitted to the government, which enabled it to decide on the further progress of the work programme.



PaLoFF
Partnership
Fleurus-Farciennes

Key elements of a local partnership

The partnerships are organized so that they can function as open and independent discussion and work platforms.

Representativity

The partnerships are representative of the community from which they arose. Close monitoring ensures that all interested local actors are represented: political, socio-cultural, environmentally-oriented and economic. In addition, private individuals and representatives from outside the municipality can also participate. In each partnership some 70 to 80 people take part, all on a voluntary and disinterested basis. One or two paid employees provide the coordination for the activities.

Democratic and autonomous functioning

Each partnership has a general meeting, a board of directors, one or two staff employees and several workgroups. Each workgroup is assisted by a member of ONDRAF/NIRAS. Each workgroup can also call on external experts if they find this necessary.

Autonomy of decision

Each partnership can decide to end its activities at any time. Each partnership also decides autonomously on the advice they give to their municipal council.

Location-specific

For both symbolic and practical reasons, the partnerships have their seat at the heart of the community from which they originate.

Autonomous budget management

The partnerships each have a budget that they manage entirely themselves.

An integrated approach tailored to the local community

With the partnership system, ONDRAF/NIRAS changed its methodology for selecting a disposal site. Initially, ONDRAF/NIRAS assumed that first the disposal installation would be designed and then a suitable location would have to be found. From 1998, ONDRAF/NIRAS studied the possibility of designing an installation that is adapted to the characteristics of the site. At the same time, the conditions set by the local community had to be met and the disposal installation had to be integrated into a broader project that can have an added value for the region.



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