

FoE Japan objects to statement by Japan's former Environment Minister: He undermined discussions on long-term storage of contaminated water at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant

On September 10, Japan's former environment minister Yoshiaki Harada stated, "My impression is that the only option is to release it into the ocean," referring to contaminated water from TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant that has been treated and is being stored on-site at the power plant.

For reasons stated below, FoE Japan views his statement as unfounded, irresponsible, and inappropriate to make as an environment minister and politician.

First, a subcommittee established by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) to discuss how to deal with treated water from the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS), is currently considering how to deal with contaminated water. At a hearing organized by the ALPS subcommittee in August 2018, many participants including representatives from the fisheries industry expressed the view that the contaminated water should be held in long-term storage on land. In response, subcommittee chair Ichiro Yamamoto made the commitment to consider on-land storage as one option. At last, the subcommittee began to discuss long term storage on land at its 13th meeting, on August 9, 2019.

Second, it is not correct to say that "the only option is to release it into the ocean." Stakeholders including the Citizens' Commission on Nuclear Energy (a citizen-based think tank that also includes experts and researchers) have consistently proposed long-term land-based storage. There were meaningful discussions at the 13th subcommittee meeting, and here are two examples of comments made by subcommittee members: "Having seen the status of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant site, it may be possible to install tanks on the northern side of the site with about the same capacity as the existing tanks." "If there is not enough space on-site, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant site could be expanded. If it is on land for medium-term storage owned by the Ministry of the Environment, the government could coordinate this."

In this context, even though he qualified his remarks by saying it was his "own impression" that "the only option is to release [contaminated water] into the ocean," this was a very irresponsible statement to make as a cabinet minister and as minister of the environment, responsible for protection of the global environmental protection and the prevention of pollution. In fact, if TEPCO or METI



were to choose the easy option of ocean dumping, it should be the role of the minister of the environment to trying to prevent the dumping, from the perspective of environmental protection.

Meanwhile, Toyoshi Fuketa, chairperson of the Nuclear Power Regulation Authority, repeated a similar message, that the only option is to dilute the treated water and release into the ocean. Here too, we believe that in making such as statement, chairperson Fuketa neglected his proper role as head of a regulatory agency. His statement was inappropriate for the same reasons as stated above.

FoE Japan strongly objects to their statements.

FoE Japan supports the approach initiated by METI's ALPS subcommittee last year to hold public hearings and make an effort to get input broadly from stakeholders, including fisheries representatives, residents, and the public. We call upon METI to give due consideration to the views expressed at public hearings and to continue with the ALPS subcommittee's examination of the option of long-term land-based storage.

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