We are here for a working-celebration of the 20th anniversary of creation of WENRA, focusing on decommissioning and waste management, a key area that WENRA has championed for almost as long.

Over the past 20 years, WENRA has made a significant contribution to nuclear safety worldwide:

- The WENRA Reference Levels have set a high standard of safety and brought consistency of approach amongst WENRA member states;

- WENRA’s initiatives to subject key fundamentals to peer review has resulted in the development of more robust approaches to emergency arrangements and response capability;

- More recently, as a strategic partner to the European Commission, WENRA is reviewing arrangements for ageing management as many of our nuclear facilities have now been in service for well over two decades.

This workshop is another timely initiative - with more than 200 reactors worldwide either in, or approaching decommissioning and many other operations and facilities coming to their end of life, it is time that as the WENRA community we focus on decommissioning and its regulation.

We have come a long way since the first generation of nuclear power plants and fuel cycle facilities were designed; today we expect to see decommissioning considered as part of the design and during the operation of any nuclear facility. However, despite all the progress we have made, most of us are at the beginning of a long road, dealing with the legacy of the first generation. Some of us are dealing with unique challenges - as we will hear during the course of this workshop.

To be clear, this is not a criticism of our predecessors - quite the contrary, they were the trail blazers, esteemed scientists and engineers that pushed the boundaries to help the society benefit from
what this industry offers. Their focus though at that time was ‘there and then’ and it was decided to leave decommissioning challenges for another day. Today, we cannot afford to do that and neither should we seek to. That is why as we celebrate our achievements so far and reflect on the learning, we should also recognise that being satisfied with gradual progress is no longer good enough given the scale of the challenge we face.

Operators, supply chain and regulators, we need to ‘up our game’ and aim for a step change - this is our collective responsibility to enable safe, timely and sustainable decommissioning. That is not to say that we overlook the safety fundamentals that have served us for many years, but it is about being innovative in our thinking, our processes and the use of technologies at our disposal to accelerate decommissioning and waste remediation. This is about expanding our horizons, learning from each other as well as other industries with similar challenges.

Taking this approach, aiming for a step-change, is no longer a “nice to do”, it’s now a necessity, because that is the only way we can ensure that we maintain, and in some cases, regain the confidence of the public in what we do. In so achieving, we ensure that future generations can also benefit from what this industry has to offer.

As regulators, we play a pivotal role, in setting and standards and securing their implementation. As we do so, we must also be clear in our expectations of what is safe enough and what is over-conservative in the context of decommissioning. Because over-conservatism will hold back progress. We must not allow ‘the Best, to become the enemy of the Good and of progress’.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish us all a constructive workshop and fruitful discussions.”