

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

Inquiry into the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation Intermediate Level Solid Waste Storage Facility at Lucas Heights

Submission by the Hon. George Gear, Chairman of Azark Project Pty Ltd. The company is working with the Shire of Leonora who have nominated to store the waste from the Lucas Heights reactor. Leonora is about 200 Kms north west of Kalgoorlie.

The committee should be aware that there has been a self nomination process which is now in its fifth year to locate and build a permanent site for the safe disposal of Intermediate Level Waste (ILW) which is currently stored at Lucas Heights.

The government has indicated that the best place to store this deadly material is above ground in a wheat field in Kimba in SA. The area chosen is in a seismically active area and the water table is low. Any leakage would be catastrophic for the whole area. I have two opinions from geologists with a combined experience of 80 years who both say the site should not be in Kimba. I can make these available to the committee if required.

A nomination for the site to store the waste was submitted by the Shire of Leonora in WA. The site was to be 16 kms from the township, underground in a body of rock which is 10 kms deep and in area that is conservatively estimated to be 40 times larger than Ayres Rock. There are no water issues. It is on the edge of the Victoria Desert.

The governments proposal in SA would cost taxpayers \$350M and would only be a temporary site for 30 years whilst a permanent location was found. The fact is that they have a permanent site already but for reasons known only to the government they won't consider this nomination.

The Leonora site fully meets the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) minimum standards of ILW: In short it is.

“waste in this class requires disposal at greater depths, of the order of tens of metres to a few hundred metres.”

It is madness to temporarily store ILW in a wheat field for 30 years with all the attendant risks, thereby not meeting acceptable storage standards, before once again shifting this deadly material to a site which we could provide this year.

Leonora is a mining town. If selected we would employ a company called Byrncut. They work in Leonora and are currently drilling at a depth of about 7,000 metres. We will be drilling down to 100 metres.

There is no need to spend an additional \$60M on yet another temporary storage of ILW in a suburban location when the Leonora site would cost about \$50M of money from the private

sector to store all of the current and future waste in complete safety and be a permanent solution.

In addition if the government were to nominate Leonora we could have the facility up and running in a shorter time frame than expanding the suburban Lucas Heights expansion which is the subject of this reference to the committee.

I urge the committee to consider the following resolution:

The committee rejects the need for additional storage space for radioactive waste at Lucas Heights.

It does so for the following reasons:

The committee has been made aware of a site in Leonora in the goldfields area of WA that:

Meets the IAEA minimum standards for storing ILW which is at depth underground. The Leonora site would be in solid granite and be a permanent solution.

The parliament has legislated to move the radioactive waste from Lucas heights back in 2012 because of the safety factor.

Leonora is the safest site to store ILW.

As the Leonora proposal is a private venture there will be no need to provide taxpayers money for construction. This will save \$350M which is the cost of the Kimba wheat field site and an additional \$60m which is the sum nominated in this reference.

Accordingly the committee recommends that the government enter in to discussions with the proponents of the Leonora proposal to ensure that claims made by this submission that Leonora is the safest and cheapest option is subject to a due diligence process.

I was a member of the Public Works Committee during my 13 years in the federal parliament. I understand the important work that the committee undertakes. During my time with the committee we mainly undertook references to major buildings such as the ABC headquarters in Ultimo and also others such as the expansion of the domestic airport in Darwin.

This reference differs in that we are talking about deadly material currently stored in a suburb of Sydney. It is lethal to humans if they are exposed to it. The solution I have offered the committee puts safety first and at a much lower cost. I urge the committee to support it.