



WILPF | AUSTRALIA

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE & FREEDOM

19 January 2024

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
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Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Committee Secretary,

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade concerning the Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Bill 2023 (the Bill).

In contributing to this inquiry, the WILPF Australia Board will:

- Introduce WILPF Australia.
- Respond to the significant issues in the Bill surrounding the disposal of high-level nuclear waste in relation to its impacts on women and indigenous communities.
- Recommend a complete rejection of the Bill.

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

WILPF Australia is a feminist peace-building organisation of volunteer activists which is anti-war, anti-violence, non-profit, and non-aligned, bringing civil society together to bring about a sustainable peace. WILPF staff, sections and members have been active and vocal supporters of the ban on nuclear weapons for over a decade, following consistent antinuclear organising and advocacy since the dawn of the nuclear age.

The Bill must be rejected

WILPF Australia vehemently rejects the Bill.

The Bill purports to regulate the nuclear safety aspects of activities relating to AUKUS submarines, however its premise, that AUKUS will specifically translate into a safer Australia, is fundamentally flawed. For years, WILPF has debunked the myth that militarisation creates a safer world, showing that more weapons and arms invariably lead to more violence, instability, and gender inequality. Australia must refuse to bend the knee to the masculinist, militarist nuclear deal proposed by the US and UK.

Nuclear Waste Dump

Disposal of high-level nuclear waste is globally unprecedented. Our AUKUS ‘partners’, the US and UK, have proven unable to dispose of the waste in the 60+ years since first putting nuclear submarines to sea.

The Bill opens a backdoor to Australia becoming the dumping ground for tonnes of high-level nuclear waste from the US and UK nuclear submarine fleets. This is due to the Bill’s definition of “an AUKUS submarine” including UK and US nuclear submarines (Part 1, Division 3, Subdivision A, clause 7).

Therefore, UK and US nuclear submarine material or equipment can be maintained, stored or disposed of in Australia. It seems that the [ALP’s National Platform](#) commitment to “remain strongly opposed to the importation and storage of nuclear waste that is sourced from overseas in Australia” were just empty words.

Serious concerns about the lack of clear safety standards for this nuclear waste are apparent. For example, Part 1, Division 2, Section 5 clause 2 broadly outlines what is “reasonably practicable” concerning safety standards on nuclear waste and submarines. These standards are taken verbatim from the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)*, alarmingly meaning the same standards we have for working at a food outlet or book shop are the ones we are using for nuclear waste.

Storage and disposal of nuclear wastes compromises the safety and welfare of the people in South and Western Australia. The fact that nuclear waste storage is prohibited in South Australia by the *SA Nuclear Waste Storage (Prohibition) Act 2000* doesn’t seem to faze the government. But this conveniently does not matter, as the Bill outlines that state law will be overridden by Federal law, meaning that waste can be dumped wherever it likes. This is shameful, not to mention a complete abuse of power at the expense of civil society’s human rights.

Women suffer disproportionately from radiation disposal

Nuclear weaponry and waste have gendered impacts.

Women face unique devastation from the effects of the use of nuclear weapons and nuclear waste, such as [reproductive and maternal health](#). It is known that women are more vulnerable to ionising radiation than men. Moreover, pregnant women exposed to high doses of ionising radiation are at risk of harm to their children, including [malformations, disabilities, as well as the risk of stillbirth](#).

There is no mention in the Bill of the disproportionate ways in which nuclear waste or nuclear radiation affects women and their children, leaving it a mystery as to how the government would care for its citizens in the wake of this dangerous deal.

Australia claims to be a “[proud and long-time supporter of](#)” the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. But the Bill’s absolute lack of a gendered-perspective or consultation with members of civil society who are women or those who give birth, demonstrates otherwise. The Bill must be rejected.

Continuation of colonialism: AUKUS destroys Indigenous land and denies Indigenous Peoples' right to say No

Australia has a long and ongoing legacy of colonialism, especially through nuclear waste disposal and nuclear testing on indigenous land and people. AUKUS and this Bill will continue these colonial and racist implications, proposing that nuclear waste be dumped on Aboriginal land, with no consultation with the First Peoples of that area.

AUKUS nuclear waste dump plans trigger the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted by United Nations, Sept 2007) in Indigenous People's Article 29 rights to "Free, Prior and Informed Consent" over storage or disposal of hazardous materials on their lands.

Traditional owners must have a right to Say No to nuclear waste and dumping on their land. With a major lack of communication with Indigenous groups that would be affected by this nuclear waste, the Bill must be rejected for its neglect of care about the First Nations people of Australia.

WILPF Australia recommends that the Bill be rejected

Australia should stand up for the good of humanity and the environment, as nuclear weaponry, storage or disposable brings absolutely no good to any living being.

The Bill sets out that a nuclear dump is likely to be imposed on community in SA and WA, with complete disregard of civil society, including the local women and Indigenous Peoples. The public has a right to know who is targeted and a right to Say No to imposition of nuclear wastes.

At minimum, AUKUS and the Bill must commit to comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 29 provision of Indigenous People's rights to "Free, Prior and Informed Consent" over storage or disposal of hazardous materials on their lands.

But even this won't sweeten a dangerously dystopic deal that risks obliterating strides in gender justice, racial justice, environmental justice and economic justice.

Margaret Reynolds
President
WILPF Australia