

Submission regarding the proposed new Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act, and the setting up of radioactive waste management in the Northern Territory

While I recognise the need, and obligation, for Australia to undertake management of the Lucas Heights radioactive waste, to be returned from overseas within the next few years, I question the location selected.

My main objections to the current plan are as follows:

1. The radioactive waste management debate in Australia has never looked at options other than remote waste dumps on Aboriginal land. The industry has never made the case that a remote shed is the best place for this material. There are considerations of travel security and of security and supervision in general, which make a better case for locating the Lucas Heights radioactive waste, stored above ground close to the point of production, close to centres of nuclear expertise and infrastructure.

2. The proposed bill overrides all relevant state and territory legislation as well as overriding Commonwealth Environmental and Aboriginal Heritage protections. It also overrides private property rights of affected individuals with regards the dump site or its access route. Once a site is chosen, it will be assessed under Commonwealth Environmental legislation which has almost no mechanisms for preventing the project from going ahead.

3. The Bill places enormous power in the hands of the Minister to assess whether or not the Muckaty site should go ahead. No information is given to how this assessment will be carried out, and the bill makes it clear that local people have no right of appeal.

4. Finally, the location of this proposed waste dump is presumably planned as a solution to the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor's spent fuel output. Yet the choice of this location raises questions not only about where Australia's hospital medical radioactive wastes might go, but also the spectre of Australia possibly taking in international nuclear wastes. One can't help noticing how convenient this location might be to those in Australia who are anxious to set up a lucrative trade in dumping, say, the USA's nuclear wastes, on aboriginal land.

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