

Submission into future considerations of nuclear energy

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I respectfully wish to emphasize that this submission be considered strictly in light of a lay perspective. Although I lack either title or qualifications, my limited interest in the nuclear issue was initially honed during participation in the South Australian Fuel Cycle Royal Commission 2016, specifically, involvement in the Citizens Jury process thereof and immediately thereafter (by invitation) to WM Symposia ANFC16 Conference.

Whereas then, my initial approach to this subject may have been pessimistic and cynical: recollection of childhood memories from the British atomic tests, I have since formed an inclusive and positive consideration; the result of research and scientific presentations associated with and during the above 'Commission' and associated 'Conference' process. Furthermore, through personal contacts, media articles, nuclear industry and government web-site emails/publications I have endeavoured to stay abreast of and be conversant with developments.

The emphasis of this submission will deal with the issue of community engagement and briefly addresses two further key points - these three being relative to my perception of community involvement and possibly thereby, the degree of public attitude/awareness in collective consideration of any future proposal re the nuclear industry. Although familiar with and keen to see Australia embrace the developing technology of small modular reactors for power generation, I will refrain from comment for reasons earlier stated.

Key Points:

- * Community engagement
 - * Economic feasibility
 - * National consensus
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Community engagement

To explain my perception; the citizens' jury facilitated a significant degree of personal interaction and discussion. My discussions/conversations with a number of participants - these across a broad age spectrum - whose comment indicated a preponderance of negativity to consideration of anything nuclear, they yet professed a willingness to engage in the various topic-specific and specialist/qualified presentations. Is an objective consideration possible when the degree of subjective prejudice seems apparent?

Arguably, the governments' intention of involving the public was honourable - even praiseworthy - yet may be misplaced given public anathema to this subject. I seriously question the logic of engaging 'citizens' in a subject of such complexity. That everyone had an opinion was evident by the degree of input to a blog site set up specifically for participant contribution. Equally arguable is whether site content/comment amounted to anything of consequence, was this analysed, was any information published to this effect and is it available for public edification?

I wish to emphasize that although the 'jury' organizers, democracyCo, presented and facilitated the event admirably, they undertook a formidable process of dissemination which, due to the sheer number of issues and associated time frames, may have resulted in an information overload.

Economic feasibility

The processing of all forms of waste entails commensurate 'costs', most of which, in varying degrees is relative to the waste product and/or form. Associated costs, in the most familiar instances, eg, household garbage, is borne directly by rate payers whereas specialized waste service costs, eg, asbestos removal is limited to the service customer, ie, user pays.

Various levels of government are responsible for, or administer, any number of services to address the processing of vast quantities and forms of waste streams. Private sector industry specialists target certain stream segment(s) where a market niche exists with the capacity to generate returns.

Nuclear waste in any form is another category altogether; the one we seem to have a particular aversion to discussing. The benefits of nuclear medicine was briefly mentioned during the Jury process, yet whilst a consensus was expressed re the benefits, very few were aware of the sheer volume of associated waste currently stored at hospital sites and elsewhere across the country.

Given public knowledge of world-wide nuclear industry cost blowouts a means of determining the economic feasibility, convincing enough to win the public over, will be no mean feat. I suggest we begin with calculating costs associated with the existing waste issue and present the findings for public edification/consideration. From a community perspective this approach is quantifiable and arguably justifiable, given the apparent approval of nuclear medicine - and would gain some leverage in public opinion and consideration of other developments. Again, in conversations with 'Jury' peers, I found an unsettling number - particularly among younger folk - expressing their distrust of either, or both, government and authorities. "Why should we trust them on such a serious matter" being a particular response that I recall. This comment was partially borne out following a lacklustre presentation for the economics segment, considered by many to be vague and largely unsubstantiated.

National consensus

Ideally, I foresee the only clear and unequivocal means of determination requires a referendum, prior to which, due consideration should be given to a nationwide 'awareness' program. This should be prepared appropriate to and in a relevant format for presentation to inclusive age groups beginning with, say, Yr6 students through to seniors. By using medical waste - something readily acceptable - as the motivational imperative might thereby establish a mindset more conducive to later expansion for incorporating other developments.

Additionally; as I mentioned in a brief address at the ANFC16 Conference, an imperative to achieving a national consensus requires the imprimatur of the indigenous peoples. No easy task given indigenous presentation to the citizens' jury. Considered in light of the fact, that across the state and prior to the Jury process a seriously significant indigenous communities approach was undertaken by representatives from the Premiers' Department, their subsequent inordinately lengthy presentation rejected any consideration whatsoever to a waste facility. Every Australians' values and perspective, with due respect for difference of opinion, applies across the entire community and at some point a scientific mediation might best prevail.

Nuclear medicines' benefit is available for all Australians and nuclear generation will need to be seen as equally beneficial.

Conclusion

Although I do not consider the key points addressed herein as being anymore important than others (listed), I felt comfortable dealing with these few familiar issues given that they also surfaced during the Jury process.

In composing this submission I seriously considered the seeming futility of contributing my unqualified opinion. However, my motivational conviction is this: if we persist in sidelining or ultimately facing the nuclear issue - past, present and future - isn't this merely another instance of 'burying our head in the sand'?

We have an urgent need to confront this issue now: formally shelved, considered an intractable problem it has become an ongoing lesson in futility, meanwhile the volume of existing waste and demand for reliable electricity grows apace.
