

To the Honourable Geoff Prosser MP.
Committee Chairman, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry and
Resources. .

Cc the Honourable Bernie Haas.

From Caroline Pembroke,
Environment Convenor,
UNAA-WA.

Dear Mr Prosser,

I was privileged to take up your invitation to the public to attend the Perth hearing, and to find out so much more about the business of submissions in general and uranium in particular.

Mr Haas mentioned the General Public on several occasions during the proceedings, and it is a member of the General Public that I write to you. My knowledge of the nuclear power issue is about the same as any thinking, hardworking man or woman, who has got to make ends meet, has little time and therefore relies upon the popular media for information. There is no time to think and research greatly about issues such as the Uranium situation in Australia, let alone to define them in a manner easy to assimilate by such hard pressed folk as ourselves.

To be honest, I have never got the drift of exactly what it was you were looking for, with the submissions, but in an aside to Mr Haas, you mentioned that there were no surprises in the evidence you were hearing. An interesting point, suggesting that your appeal for submissions had hoped to get some regular, open comment from less professionally and economically involved sources, perhaps?

But just exactly what are we debating here? If as a member of the General Public, you want my views on how we mine and sell Uranium, I'm happy to give them, as below. But most people would wonder why their views were important. Its not as if our input or approval is being sought for the mining and selling of uranium ore, or even necessary, as witness the sales to China, and that puts folk off immediately.

But if my views on Uranium mining and refining were important at all, here they are.

Nuclear Power in the World, a comment by a member of the General Public.

In no particular order, comments, queries and observations on the mining usage and waste storage of uranium.

- Stability of Australian land mass, currently assumed, needs updating, from concepts of over 15 years ago. . Refer work of Prof Mike Sandiford, U Melbourne <http://jaeger.earthsci.unimelb.edu.au/msandifo/Policy/nuclear.html>
- Why is the centre of Australia being referred openly to as 'wasteland' by proponents of the 'use Australia as a Waste disposal site'. There is arguably no waste land upon this Planet which man did not create. In well balanced Nature, every strip of land and water has creatures which live there, be they plant or animal. They are all part of the Web of Life.
- In selling as quirky a product as Uranium, which has so many possibilities to increase the toxicities upon the Planet, no nation which has any sense of responsibility would surely ever sell to another country which could not dispose of the wastes in an provable, effective, reliable and responsible manner. No member of the General Public would have any idea of how to assess whether this was being done or not, or whether the measures in place are acceptable, or what resolutions/directives from the UN and other responsible international bodies such as IAEA, were being followed in the actual contracts to mine and sell.
- How much Uranium is there on the Planet, and how long will it last?
- Does a visible portion of profits from the mining and sale of this non-renewable energy resource go towards making renewable energy resources available (greenhouse gas considerations sorted out satisfactorily, etc), economically profitable and ready to take over when uranium runs out.
- While nuclear power is 'environmentally greener' than any other current energy resource, the infrastrucure needed to access and mine the ore plus the construction of reactors and waste disposal sites might result in increased levels of greenhouse gas, cancelling the good effects at the power production level.
- What is good for people? Well, at a physical level, and that's not one which seems to get much playing time in the economic and scientific world, what is good for people are products which do not cause toxic effects to the Life Cycle. Looked at simply, the by products of natural living organisms on this Planet, and that includes you and I and all humans, is so "designed by Nature" that they do not hurt the capacity of the Planet to clean up in a manner which keeps us healthy. Our daily bodily wastes and eventually our corpses are a harmless part of the lifecycle. **So why produce anything which is harmful to this vital cycle, upon which all we who are breathing breathe depend?.**
- Be it uranium mining, or chemical spills, or the disastrous effects of the petroleum industry, a lot of rubbish is now going into the natural environment to get cleaned up. No one appears to know what the capacity of the Earth's natural processes is to deal with the amount of 'pollutants', and still keep safe and healthy for the living inhabitants. There will logically be a point when this is no longer possible.

- Does the Uranium Commission consider that the Earth's natural processes would be sufficient to handle the clean up after another upsurge in mining and related activities.
- It has been said that not one uranium mining/refining facility, for peaceful or military purposes, has yet been satisfactorily decommissioned. As member of the General Public, it would be reassuring to find that this is not so.
- Burying the wastes. This is only storage, not a solution. It was so 30 years ago, and it still is so. The General Public has no idea of the processes involved in 'clean-up' nor how effective they are, words like 'vitreous storage' and 'dilution' are completely undefined.
- It would seem reasonable to have some visible, credible research into the toxic wastes and their capacity to be re-refined into harmless, inert compounds. Can we be given examples of such research?
- How much toxic nuclear waste is estimated to be 'out there'? It has been suggested that Australia take it all. What would this encompass, where is it, and in what condition.
- If Australia became a repository for toxic wastes, this could easily spread sideways into other industries which also produce toxic by products.
- Is there any relevant social research into the possible effects that a world perception of Australia as being a toxic waste dump, might have on tourism and primary industries?
- Finally, a member of the General Public assumes that one of the oft stated reasons for failure to address the above situations in any industry is "its not profitable". This says something about the Business Community, if it cannot find good ways to make money out of cleaning up the Planet, and keeping it safe for the living organisms, including ourselves, who inhabit it. If money can be made out of the 'destruction' then it surely can be made out of the 're-construction'.

The Honourable Mr Prosser and The Honourable Mr Haas, thankyou for taking the time to hear from a Member of the General Public. I hope you use your influence and experience to bring wise and beneficial governance to such an issue as nuclear power. It is a very big responsibility, given the very considerable reasonable doubts, and I sincerely wish you all the very best in your deliberations on the development of the non fossil fuel industry in Australia.

With kind regards,
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Please also note that while I am the Environment Convenor for the UNAA-WA and my comments derive from a general agreement from our last Committee meeting September 19th that we should send a comment on the Uranium Mining situation to the Industry and Resources Committee, they are still at this stage simply the observations of a Member of the General Public.

but I kept interested in the topic of what was happening with uranium and the mining of it, and so forth. In particular the storage of the toxic wastes. Maxine McHugh's interview with Bob Hawke was terrifying for the fact that none of the right questions/answers seemed to be there for the viewers, for the "general public" [frequently mentioned by Mr Haas], to appreciate and respond to.

It is very hard to gain some personal understanding of the very significant operations now before us in the form of the mining export and refining and waste storage of uranium ore, let alone be able to make an 'informed comment', one which would be worth the Committee's time.

However, speaking as a member of the General Public, with access only to the internet, popular media reportage and common sense, and in consultation with the Environment Sub Committee of the unaa-wa, here is my take on the matter.

Nobody objects to the usage of the uranium ore. It is the rather horrible attributes which come with the obtaining and refining of the ore which raises a lot of questions.

Warfare and pollution.

Mr John Stern Wolf, [IAEA, etc] indicated that there were numerous so far unsolved elements in the usage of uranium, and its toxic by products, creating an already hazardous condition upon our Planet.

Can it be responsible to continue to mine and sell and use uranium, without at least an equal and visible commitment to research into returning the by products to the Planet in a form as harmless as tapwater. The record is not impressive Take petroleum. Just look at the situation everywhere because of the lack of industrial consideration that cleanup was as important as usage, and factoring that into the economic scheme of things. At present all toxic by products and accidents from our motorised societies, are being cleaned up by the natural processes of the Planet, the earth/air/water cycle.

Can you be sure that the Planet could cope if you exponentially increased the use of Uranium ore. It is not answer to bury it deeply. That was the answer 30 years ago, and it's not encouraging that it's the same answer.

The stability of the Australian Land mass needs challenging. In the past 15 years, research into the tectonic plates has produced evidence which at least should be put before the Australian people, which suggests that while Australia could be suitable for nuclear waste storage, it isn't all that stable. {Prof Mike Sadiford U of Melbourne}

And who can say what effect the burying of waste on our shores would have on the world perception of Australia as a place to visit, or a place to buy goods from? No-one can say.

Show us the research into making the whole process a safe one.

The equation is quite easy, really. It has never been acknowledged by science technology and business, that any byproduct which is not able to be harmlessly assimilated into the foodchain [earth air water], should not be condoned.

Make money, but incorporate responsibility to all who try to live upon this Earth.

Thankyou,

Caroline Pembroke.