



Friday 9 August 2002

Secretary  
Senate ECITA References Committee,  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT, 2600

**Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Environmental Regulation of Uranium Mining**

The Minerals Council of Australia (the Council) welcomes the Senate Inquiry into Environmental Regulation of Uranium Mining and the opportunity to provide comment to the Committee. The Council also looks forward to working with Government in relation to the development of any recommendations as a result of the findings of the Inquiry.

The Council acknowledges and supports the legitimate community expectations that all mines, especially uranium mines, are operated in accordance with best practice standards in environmental management and social responsibility.

The Council makes the following comments in response to the terms of reference for the Inquiry:

- Uranium mining operations in Australia are subject to the most rigorous performance, monitoring and reporting requirements, at both the State and Commonwealth level, of any mineral commodity in Australia. For example, some uranium mine sites are subject to monthly visits by regulators whereas, in comparison, other mineral commodities are generally subject to annual visits;
- In addition to regulatory reporting requirements, Council member companies also provide annual public environmental reports as signatories to the Australian Minerals Industry Code of Environmental Practice;
- Extensive monitoring and reporting requirements are applied to uranium mine sites in Australia to ensure that information is provided in an open and transparent manner to facilitate accountability;
- The Council has considerable concern with the negative community perceptions generated by the frequent misrepresentation of the data that companies provide through their reporting requirements, particularly about events which have low environmental risk;
- Through application of the highest standards to its operations, the Australian minerals industry actively manages its impacts to avoid environmental or health effects.

In addition to the specific responses to the terms of reference, the Council makes the following comments in relation to the significant role that the uranium industry plays in Australia and internationally:

- The production of uranium plays a significant economic and social role in remote and regional Australia. In the Northern Territory, uranium mining provides approximately 10% of gross product and has delivered \$187million in royalty payments. It also provides significant employment opportunities for Indigenous people;

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- Uranium comprises over 40% of Australia's energy exports (in thermal terms);
- Australia supplies approximately 22% of the world market for mined uranium, and directly supplies 12% of world reactor requirements;
- The focus on greenhouse gas emission abatement and adaption and low emission technologies could result in substantial increases in the use of nuclear power for electricity generation; and
- Australia has 28% of the world's recoverable uranium resources and is well placed to meet the growing demands.

In light of the above, and while recognising and sharing the concerns generated by recent incidents, the Council makes the following recommendations to the Committee:

- That the Committee recommend a protocol that provides a clear interpretation of the monitoring and reporting data provided by the State and Commonwealth statutory regulators and the uranium companies. This recommendation is based on the demonstrated adequacy of the current regulatory requirements and the significant experience of the uranium industry in managing social and environmental risk; and
- That the Committee seek a review of the current regulatory requirements to ensure that they provide for the maintenance of the highest possible standards of protection whilst reducing unnecessary administrative burden.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission further please do not hesitate to contact me directly on (02) 6279 3600 or contact Michael Bissell, Senior Policy Adviser – Sustainable Development, who has carriage of this issue on (02) 6279 3627 or at [mj.bissell@minerals.org.au](mailto:mj.bissell@minerals.org.au)

Yours sincerely

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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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