



The Chair
Senator Judith Troeth
Senate Employment,
Workplace Relations and
Education Committee
Inquiry into Commonwealth
Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005

Dear Judith,

I have some serious concerns in regards to the Federal Government's proposed legislation that can facilitate the construction of a low level radioactive waste dump in the Northern Territory.

I have a professional background in Environmental Impact Assessment and I am extremely concerned that these proposed legislative changes will hinder an accurate assessment of any proposed nuclear waste facility by providing a 'fast-track' opportunity which is completely inappropriate for any nuclear facility.

Careful consideration and inclusion of the local community is central to a *secure* nuclear waste facility. Without this support Australians are vulnerable to the imposition of inappropriate nuclear waste facilities which have caused serious environmental and community health issues in several states in the United States of America which employed similar techniques over the last 4 decades.

Despite the attempts in the media to down play the risks of low level radioactive waste; these substances are toxic for 3 to 4 hundred years, and are not safe to humans or any species of flora or fauna. This means that to ensure the health and safety of our community *best practice* management techniques are necessary. There are numerous examples of best practice nuclear waste management around the world and all of these include an *extensive community input into decision making process*. AIF (Assured Isolation Facilities) is one approach that could greatly inform the Federal Government's process of Inquiry into these facilities. A central component of AIF is community input into the decision making process.

Ignoring the NT Government, local governments, the traditional owners and the scientific community is not *best practice* – it is nonsensical and foolhardy. Consultation and input from local authorities and traditional owners from the proposed sites and from those along transport routes is fundamental to any acceptable nuclear waste facility.

Experience from Europe shows that similar facilities imposed on local communities invoke serious resistance which causes extensive delays, undermines community confidence and removes the support of the local community which is crucial to the security of these facilities. The Federal Government proposal contravenes the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) guidelines which maintain that such facilities require community consent and a reasonable degree of 'social license'. This legislation is inconsistent with this international obligation.

Furthermore;

- The overriding of existing provisions of federal and territory law that could hinder or delay the dump plan is a disturbing precedent that greatly undermines community confidence in the Commonwealth's actions on this issue - and its future intentions.
- The federal legislation would allow the proposed NT waste dump to be turned into an international radioactive waste dump housing highly radioactive materials from all around the world - effectively forever.

- The Inquiry period is far too short to deal with the complexity of the issues involved and it is insulting that the committee has not bothered to travel to the NT to hear directly from the most affected community.
- The claims about the need for the dump in order to maintain access to high quality nuclear medicine are wrong and are contradicted by senior medical professionals including the former head of medical research at the Lucas Heights nuclear facility - Professor Barry Allen.
- The sites chosen for the NT dump were not selected through any scientific assessment.
- All political parties in the NT are opposed to the imposition of the dump.
- This legislation has been criticised by the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee for its adverse impacts 'on personal rights and liberties'.
- The legislation is heavy handed and anti-democratic. It removes the ability of local, territory and state governments to adequately reflect the concerns and aspirations of the communities they represent.
- Good public policy is developed through negotiation and inclusion - not imposed by governments determined to get their way no matter what.

I urge the Inquiry into the Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005 to seriously consider these concerns, resist the political pressure to fast-track any decision on the matter and take responsibility for this important decision making process which will impact on the health and security of Australians for generations to come.

Yours Sincerely,

Euan Williamson