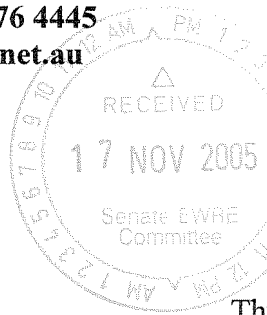


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Thursday, 17 November 2005

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

Dear Members of the Inquiry:

My first thought when considering a submission was – what does the government believe that the democratic process consists of. Is it a fiat of government or are the individuals who will be involved in the process given adequate time and consideration to formulate their needs and obligations? Judging by the nature of this inquiry it would seem that the fiat option is the operative one. I say that for the following reasons: -

The government has selected three possible locations (near Katherine and Alice Springs) and introduced legislation into Federal parliament that would prevent the NT government or the community from doing anything to 'hinder or delay' the construction of a waste dump. Environment and Indigenous groups are working with the wider community, local government, and landholders to prevent this unnecessary and dangerous dump.

The overriding of existing provisions of federal and territory law that could hinder or delay the dump plan is a disturbing precedent and certainly does not fit into the context of a democratic finding.

The federal government has failed to indicate that there is a compelling urgency for the proposed legislation.

Transport routes are very important because accidents happen, even with the best of planning, and therefore the communities through which the nuclear waste are planned to travel must be consulted.

I understand that access to high quality nuclear medicine has been mooted as a reason for the dump. Perhaps the committee should hear from senior medical professionals who include Professor Barry Allen, the former head of medical research at Lucas Heights.

The Northern Territories would appear to be a non-entity in the search for a nuclear waste dump as its objections to the use of its land for that purpose have been completely ignored. Perhaps members of the committee should put themselves in a situation where their rights were arbitrarily ignored as they consider the submissions made.

Over many years humanity has reached the stage where it is realised that the world is one and that international agreements are a necessary method whereby nations can act in a group to ensure that they remove the potential for conflict, both within and without, the national boundaries. As the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) maintains that such facilities require community consent and a reasonable degree of 'social license', this legislation is inconsistent with this international obligation.

Overriding community expectations tends to lead to a willingness to ignore laws and regulations. This is the sort of legislation that produces the rebellious types, and has no place in a democratic society. But then, as stated previously, do we really live in a democratic state of being. Governments abuse their power, especially in the present circumstances where the Coalition holds the majority votes in both houses of

parliament. If the government persists in this abuse of power it has the propensity to encourage lack of interest in the country's politics. Why bother to vote, they'll do it anyway.

In closing, I trust that the Senators on the committee will exercise good judgement and not merely follow the path of overriding people's rights just because the voting power is there.

Yours sincerely

Arnold Ward

- 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 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.