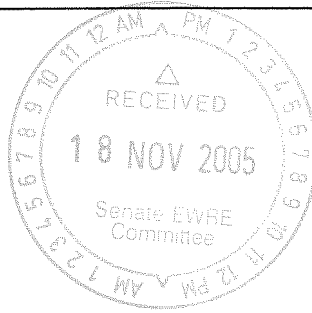


## SUBMISSION

### Inquiry into the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005

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The Chair – Senator Judith Troeth

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee  
Inquiry into the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005

We are Alice Springs residents passionately concerned about the local, national and potentially global implications of the proposed Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005. We are but few of the overwhelming and well-informed majority of Alice Springs residents opposed to this Bill, residents whose views will be little heard by a one-day committee hearing in Canberra. Like many, we only heard of the deadline for submissions in this evening's news. We nevertheless wish to make the following brief points of relevance to the subject of this inquiry:

1. We have grave concerns about the rushed and reckless bill proposed by the federal government to “do anything necessary” to impose its will against enormous popular sentiment, scientific opinion, and the wisdom of traditional owners by constructing a national radioactive waste dump at any of the three proposed sites (Harts Range, Mt Everard and Fisher's Ridge). We have heard no attempt to justify the urgency of this project in any way equivalent to the ungainly haste with which we have seen the Commonwealth push this bill.
2. We fear for the impact that a national radioactive waste dump will have on our local environment, water supply, tourist industry and pastoral industry. Alice Springs has absolutely nothing to gain from a radioactive waste dump and everything to lose.
3. For such a serious decision to be made without even the most token effort at consultation with locals, the NT government, Aboriginal landowners, or communities along the proposed transport route, represents a sheer arrogance and abuse of power which hardly instills a sense of confidence about the government's skills in transparently managing radioactive waste materials into the future. The fact this current inquiry will not venture beyond Canberra, not to mention visiting the people most affected by the proposal, only furthers the insult.
4. The bill is an affront to our federal system of government, attempting to block the will of states and territories in an unprecedented and heavy-handed way. It presents a dangerous precedent for a schoolyard bully style of law-making which should concern all people and communities who expect the three tiers of government to mean just that.
5. We have absolutely no faith in the promises of this government with regards to the safety or the future scale or uses of the proposed dump, when only months ago the Northern Territory was given an “absolute categorical assurance” that an NT dump would not go ahead. We also note that this dump has been deceptively marketed on the basis that its purpose is for storing hospital

gowns and gloves, with relatively scant mention of spent nuclear fuel rods. In fact the states' hospitals (except the Northern Territory, and we were an afterthought) will have no access to this dump for their low level radioactive waste. The little-mentioned spent rods, we are told, represent "medium" level radioactive waste. We know this to be a convenient twist of semantics, as the very same rods are defined as "high level" outside Australia.

6. ANSTO scientists describe the half-life of some of this radioactive material in the thousands of years. We find it ridiculous that any government can plan for the management of a site thousands of years into the future, and seriously disturbing that the current proposal does not seem to contemplate the management of the site even into the medium term.
7. We are skeptical of any scientific expert who can claim to accurately predict the properties of radioactive substances, casing materials, storage methods and climactic conditions hundreds of years into the future. We remember that it was only fifty years ago that similar experts advised schoolchildren to shelter under their desks in the event of a nuclear bomb.
8. We believe that should such a project ever go ahead, that all Australians (whether for or against) would expect it to be a highly regulated operation. Instead what we see in this bill is that one of the most dangerous industries dealing in some of the most dangerous substances in fact do not even have to follow the same environmental laws as the rest of the Territory. What better evidence for the federal government's own lack of faith in the safety of this project can there be than the fact that, through this bill, it aims to systematically remove even mundane levels of environmental regulation.
9. We find it oppressive and racist that the sites chosen are in close proximity to Aboriginal communities, outstations and sacred sites. We regard the attitude that such places are "in the middle of nowhere" as highly insulting and ill-educated and in the same vein of so many mistakes of the past under the "Terra Nullius" mindset.
10. We note that no genuine justification has yet been forthcoming about the need for the new reactor at Lucas Heights, for which this radioactive dump is the consequence. Medical professionals of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War and the Public Health Association, and even the former head of nuclear medicine at the Lucas Heights reactor, Professor Barry Allen, have dismissed the government's suggestion that it is necessary for the sake of medicine.
11. The "commonsense" argument that the radioactive waste already exists and needs to be stored somewhere, ignores the fact that this dump is principally about the *expansion* of radioactive-waste-producing activities rather than the storage of existing waste. Indeed, we fear that this dump is about an even more serious expansion. We believe that this national radioactive dump will likely become an international radioactive waste dump within a decade or two, and will represent a convenient catalyst for the expansion of the uranium mining, nuclear power and nuclear weapons industries in Australia and globally. No doubt these developments will be based on the same lies prominent today about the "clean and green" qualities of nuclear. The global environmental impacts of choosing the nuclear path rather than (immensely cheaper) sustainable alternatives are potentially disastrous.
12. Many Commonwealth politicians have attempted to dismiss regional Australia as if we had no knowledge or concerns beyond our own backyards. We have been pictured as though we were selfishly squabbling among ourselves trying to move this dump elsewhere. In fact this bill and the proposed national radioactive waste dump threatens both our backyard and yours. While we believe the imperative for good management would be much stronger if it was situated in Canberra, for the reasons outlined above we reject the need for a national radioactive waste dump anywhere.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and hope that its haste will not reduce the sense of responsibility with which you as committee members approach your task.

Yours sincerely,

Renee Lees  
Sarah Hoyal  
Sarah Katz