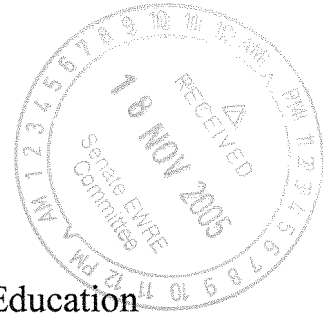


# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
Legislation Committee



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

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It is of enormous disappointment to me that the Federal Government has felt the need to enact legislation (the *Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005*) stripping the Northern Territory Government of its legislative rights to resist the establishment of a nuclear waste dump in the Northern Territory. This action smacks of a need for unconscionable haste. One can but wonder why.

That central Australia has a low human population density, which is for ecological rather than economic reasons, is not in itself a reason to establish a nuclear waste dump here. Indeed, central Australia has a relatively intact and untarnished landscape, which is demonstrably not the case with much of the rest of Australia. With complete lack of foresight, the Federal Government puts the fragility and the integrity of that landscape at risk. Whilst one may argue about the extent of that risk, without doubt there is a risk. Whilst the risk can be minimized, it cannot be absolutely taken away. It is not without irony that the people that use nuclear technology less than anyone in Australia, are the ones that seem destined, in the Federal Government's eyes at least, to cope with its toxic waste.

As a scientist, I cannot accept that those involved in this decision have fully investigated and assessed the ramifications of the decision to establish a central repository for nuclear waste in central Australia. One needs to accept that any waste needs to be dealt with effectively, and that the people of those lands upon where the site will be located will feel aggrieved. There will be political ramifications. However, that does not mean that there should not be, in the first instance, appropriate and detailed assessment of the environmental, social and economic impacts of all potential sites.

Clearly, there are other available sites. There has been at least two senior staff from The Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) that have stated in the electronic media that other sites are available. One of those, Dr. Ron Cameron said on the ABC Stateline on 28/10/2005 that:

*Well I mean technically there would be many sites that would be suitable for such a repository we know a lot in the engineering sense, about how to engineer them safely, people elsewhere in the world don't have the advantage that Australia has to have all these sites with good geology, and good access to them, they have built repositories in much worse conditional that what we are talking about here so it is possible to engineer sites in various environments but we have some very good sites in the NT which will be suitable for a repository as well as a store.*

<http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/nt/content/2005/s1493375.htm> 16/11/05

I can think of myriad reasons that the sites here in central Australia under consideration are inappropriate and unjustifiable. However, I think that in the first instance, we can expect and deserve a full public investigation of all of the issues and consequences surrounding the selection of a suitable site, be that here or anywhere in Australia.

The location of this nuclear waste dump will threaten this landscape, and with it a lucrative and burgeoning tourism industry. Moreover, the lands upon which the dumps will be located have been excised, in one form or another, from the lands of Australia's most marginalized people, its indigenous inhabitants. On some levels it is the greatest insult that can be leveled. Clearly, the *Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005* states that it will over-ride those Acts that would otherwise have protected cultural and biodiversity values.

## 6 Application of Commonwealth laws

The following laws have no effect to the extent that they would, apart from this section, regulate, hinder or prevent the doing of a thing authorised by section 4:

- (a) the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*;
- (b) the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Whilst I do not profess to speak on behalf of anyone else, I must note that I work closely with some of the Traditional Owners of the land under question near Alice Springs, and they have all expressed their disappointment at the decisions of the Federal Government. The wilful damage of a Sacred Site in Alice Springs has since been labelled the Street of Broken Promises. The 'broken promises' term has also been used as a descriptor in this instance too. One of the Old Men with whom I spend some time has commenced drinking more heavily, and speaking with greater sorrow at the damage to landscape. Whilst I can't fully comprehend the connection between self, spirit and landscape at the level that illness can result, I can empathise, and feel certain that it is not coincidence in this Old Man's case.

I urge the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee to ensure that a full, objective and open environmental, social and economic investigation occurs, and the outcomes are abided by.

Sincerely,

Gary Fry