

Friday November 18, 2005

Submission to the Senate Committee Inquiry into 'The Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005'.

Just over a year ago the Commonwealth government gave "absolute categorical assurance" to the Northern Territory that they would not be targetted for a Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Repository. Not only has the government now gone back on this promise but have taken further steps to over-ride existing provisions of federal and territory law that apply to the establishment of such a facility.

These laws exist to protect public and the environment from the unacceptable imposition of dumping of radioactive waste. It concerns me greatly that the government should see the need to override these laws and brings in to question the validity of their case for establishing such a facility.

Claims have been made that this dump is needed in order to maintain access to high quality nuclear medicine. This is simply providing misleading information to the public. Whilst the current reactor does supply some radioisotopes for medical use it is a small percentage of the operations that are carried out at the reactor and accounts for a fraction of the waste produced. Isotopes for medical use can be produced by other means which do not create the same level of dangerous and long lived wastes. Therefore these grounds cited by the commonwealth are simply not good enough.

Were this legislation be allowed to proceed it would allow the proposed NT waste facility to be turned into a international dump housing highly radioactive materials from around the world. Widespread opposition to proposals for an international waste dump by Pangea some years ago sent a clear message that the people of Australia do not wish our beautiful country to become a global radioactive waste dump.

There has certainly not been allowed adequate time for public submission and the committee has refused to travel to the Northern Territory for the hearing which is surprising given that this is a serious issue and this is where people will be most directly affected by this legislation.

There has been no consultation with the NT government or community, traditional Aboriginal landowners or those on the proposed transport routes. Northern Territory government, community and Traditional Owners have expressed important concerns for public health and the environment. This legislation is an attempt to silence these concerns and effectively means that these issues will not be adequately addressed.

All political parties in the NT are opposed to the establishment of a commonwealth waste dump in the Northern Territory. This piece of legislation removes the ability of local, territory and state governments to fully present the concerns of the communities they represent and the vision for a future that these communities wish to create.

Good policy is developed through thorough community consultation and negotiation not bullying. This legislation has been criticised by the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee for its adverse impacts 'on personal rights and liberties'.

As a final note, the federal government has failed to provide valid reasons for the need for this piece of legislation or for the urgency to put this piece of legislation in place. These actions undermine public confidence in the federal government.

I hope that this committee will make the right decision and put a stop to this piece of legislation which is undemocratic and shows lack of respect for the people of the Northern Territory and all Australians.

Yours sincerely
Michaela Stubbs