

Committee Secretary  
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

## **Submission to Senate Inquiry on the Radioactive Waste Management Bill**

Dear Committee Secretary, I am writing this submission in favour of the planned legislated amendments to ensure best practice management of Radioactive Waste here in Australia.

For too long Australia has failed to grasp an integrated process, for the storage and management of radioactive waste material. Since the involvement of Australia in the 'Manhattan Project', and through the nuclear testing at Maralinga and Monte Bello, and the boom in uranium mining in the 50's and early 60's Australia has failed to clean up radioactive waste from these sites in an orderly manner.

In the late 50's we saw the ADF using sea dumping from aircraft as a method of disposal, the attached link shows a brief story on this: [www.theadvertiser.news.com.au/sectionindex2/0,5935,woomera%5Ewoomera%5ETEXT,00.html](http://www.theadvertiser.news.com.au/sectionindex2/0,5935,woomera%5Ewoomera%5ETEXT,00.html) - 45k

The above story shows that the sea dumping was only the aircraft and equipment, the most hazardous waste the plutonium laden soil was left to blow around the desert until the 1998 site cleanup.

So our legacy in competently managing radioactive waste is abominable. Australia's current system of radioactive storage is not much better with a myriad of hospital basement vaults and decrepit Commonwealth buildings strewn across the landscape in a haphazardly managed manner. A single storage repository site for all should be found, and a permanent structure built to house all of Australia's radioactive waste.

The three sites already mooted as a possibility here in the NT are not the best sites either in a logistical or geotechnical sense, the meagre fact that they are owned by the Commonwealth should not be the only merit used to choose a radioactive repository site. Of the three sites mooted the Haarts Range site is probably best, but across the expanse of the NT there are many more sites that show more logistical and geotechnical merit, therefore a full and thorough review of site potentials should be performed.

Whilst this bill for radioactive waste management is a step in the right direction it seems to encompass Australia's existing radioactive waste management problems and the future shipments of spent HIFAR and OPAL fuel rods. However it does not address possible future storage needs should there be a policy change on nuclear fuels in the future.

Here in Australia we have many energy resources that we export in a value added form, with LNG being the main export, in the future the finite gas resources will be exhausted after this occurs our major trading partners will be looking for other energy sources from our resource rich landscape. The obvious energy source of the future is nuclear and Australia should be planning for this now as we have 23% of the worlds known uranium resources. Perhaps we should be planning to value add our uranium resources one step further beyond yellow cake and into reactor fuel rods that can be leased and returned when spent.

Our two major potential markets are China and India, who both have nuclear power reactors and are planning for a substantial amount more in the future. The dilemma we have in trading raw yellow cake to these two nations is that both are outside of the (multilateral) Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NNPT) of which we are a signatory. So a method needs to be put in place whereby we can trade radioactive fuel sources without breaching our NNPT obligations or upsetting our multilateral partners in the treaty. Currently France and Canada, both NNPT partners are intending to lease fuel rods to China as a way of getting around this clause, why should they have all the benefits, the French by the way are using our Australian mined uranium to enrich and possibly lease to China.

If the new waste repository incorporated an enrichment and wet pool storage facility also, it would more than pay for itself and it would also allow a more strategic approach to our geopolitical stability area of the Sub-Continent east Asia. Whilst China and India are our inevitable trading partners, so to are the US and Canada and an approach like this would keep all these trading partners happy!