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

I urge the Inquiry to recommend to the Senate that the legislation THE COMMONWEALTH RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT BILL 2005 be rejected and voted down.

The legislation is flawed on a number of points.

It does nothing to deal with the management of Australia's nuclear waste. It assumes that simply moving nuclear waste around the country constitutes management of this hazardous product. This is utterly false. Dr Cameron from ANSTO stated publicly, just last year in 2004, that there is sufficient space at the Lucas Heights site to store present and future waste. This solution is infinitely more suitable as previous agencies have done in the past. By leaving the waste at Lucas Heights it stays at the centre of Australia's nuclear expertise rather than removing it to a remote location such as the Northern Territory where this expertise is non-existent. Removing it to the Northern Territory is the 'out of sight of mind' option.

Storage of Nuclear waste at the site of production is common practice at a number of major nuclear installations overseas, including Canada and Japan. It also allows for research into more effective methods of storage because funds are not diverted into expensive maintenance and transport options.

Of course, it would be most prudent to stop the production of nuclear waste. We have more than enough waste to be dealt without producing more. The money saved from subsidising expensive nuclear production of isotopes could then be diverted into research into cutting edge technology to replace the use of reactor based isotopes.

Removal of the current and future Nuclear waste is to be by road transport. This is unsuitable mainly because of the vast distance to be transported. This risk to transport routes and the surrounding communities of a possible breach of container integrity is too high. The potential for sabotage of a nuclear waste conveyer is real and growing. The potential threat to Australia's clean green agricultural image is not worth taking if high production areas are to be part of the nuclear waste transport route. The committee must remember that after the large initial transport of current waste inventories, nuclear waste transports will continue for many decades to come, if and when the new reactor comes online. This legislation will have ramifications too far into the future for us to be confident in its effectiveness.

The sites selected in the Northern Territory will impact on freehold land, but more importantly on Indigenous land. Are we to once again desecrate indigenous sites as this nation has done in the past? It is time to stop this practice of 'dumping' on Aboriginal lands, because non indigenous people see them as remote.

The decision to use these areas as Australia's nuclear waste dump will also impact on the tourist trade in the region. Potential tourism will be put off by the increase in security that will be necessary and the risk of being in a radiologically hazardous area or near a nuclear waste transport route. The economy of some areas could be seriously hampered by the imposition of this waste dump.

Community opposition is widespread including environmental, Indigenous, local government, landholders and the wider community across the nation. All the groups are opposed to the proposal and are very concerned with the lack of due process and the haste with which the proposal is being forced onto the Northern Territory. The suspicion is that corners are being cut in order to expedite the waste dump to fulfill the requirements of the ARPANSA conditions for the licensing to operate the new reactor at Lucas Heights.

Without a waste management strategy, ARPANSA CEO, John Loy has difficulty in allowing ANSTO the necessary license to start the new reactor which is already behind schedule. This is not the right way to deal with this intractable problem.

This legislation sets a dangerous precedence. It seeks to override normal community consultation, participation and discussion, which has previously allowed the best possible legislation to be enacted. The nature of the product at the heart of this legislation does not allow for mistakes and every caution should be taken to get it right first time, because with nuclear waste we do not get a second chance. To impose this legislation on the Northern Territory will alienate the Australian public from their Parliament. To this end, the legislation should be rejected.

Lorraine Dixon.