

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE NT WASTE DUMP

Senator Troeth and Committee,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the hastily proposed Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005.

WHY THE RUSH?

I do not believe there has been a compelling case put forward by the Federal Government to show that this legislation is necessary to rush through Parliament. Decisions of such great importance require a thorough process of consultation with all groups potentially affected by the facility, as well as the Australian public at large.

The Inquiry period of two weeks is far too short to deal with the complexity of the issues involved

HERE, THERE OR ANYWHERE...

None of the three possible locations chosen for the NT dump were selected through scientific assessment. It seems that after failure to impose a low-level radioactive waste dump in South Australia, the Government has again disregarded proper procedure, opting instead to choose federally managed sites to more easily override community opposition to the proposed low and medium level waste facility.

WHOSE WASTE?

The majority of waste that will be stored in the proposed dump will be coming from Lucas Heights, a Commonwealth research facility run by ANSTO (Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation). Though the research reactor is expounded as an essential facility for production of medical isotopes, this claim is contradicted by senior medical professionals including the former head of medical research at the Lucas Heights nuclear facility - Professor Barry Allen.

There are effective, non-nuclear methods of producing isotopes, such as in cyclotrons, and I would hope that sufficient attention and funding is being directed into the continued research of isotope generation through these means so the technology can advance and phase out the dangerous and outdated nuclear technology.

As the ageing reactor, and its almost completed replacement, are located in Sutherland Shire, New South Wales, the NT proposal will thus entail transporting multiple shipments of dangerous radioactive materials long distances to the dump site.

It also greatly concerns me that this legislation could allow expansion of the site at the whim of the Federal Government to co-locate an international waste dump. Though the Federal Government states Australia will not accept waste from overseas at the site, it also earlier gave an "absolute categorical assurance" to the NT that there would be no nuclear dump imposed. The new legislation is in complete conflict with this earlier promise, and does not therefore set a standard for trusting what the Government promises on this issue.

It is no secret that international companies, supported by ex-politicians and other prominent members of the Australian community, have heralded Australia as the ideal dumping ground for the World's nuclear waste. It is the responsibility of this Committee to ensure decisions are not made hastily because of this external pressure.

WHY NOT ASK THE PEOPLE?

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) maintains that such facilities require community consent and a reasonable degree of 'social license' to operate in a region or country. The Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005 is inconsistent with this international obligation. It is heavy handed and anti-democratic,

silencing the voices of Traditional Owners, landholders and communities and removing the ability of local, territory and state governments to act reflecting their constituents' concerns and aspirations

The Inquiry has failed to respect or even recognise the opinions of the Traditional Owners, who have expressed grave concerns about the potential impacts such a facility may have on the environment, their culture, and all people living in the area.

There are thousands of people living along the potential transport routes who also deserve direct notification and the opportunity to express their concerns.. They have a right to decide if radioactive materials can pass through their communities, especially when they would likely not be notified about the time of transportation, and when Emergency Service Workers in New South Wales have admitted they are ill equipped, inadequately trained and unwilling to deal with an accident of this nature. The Government itself admits there is a possibility of an accident during transportation. These are not odds stacked in anyone's favour, nor a risk worth taking for purely economic reasons. Like many Australians, I disagree with the priorities of the Australian Nuclear Association secretary Clarence Hardy who said: "There will be some public resistance but more importantly it will make Australia billions of dollars."

The waste that we already have will remain radioactive and needing to be closely monitored for many generations to come. I believe it is unjust and irresponsible to continue creating this radioactive legacy to leave to future generations. The waste must be stored close to the site of production where it is easier to monitor and there should be immediate measures taken to stop the further production of waste that there is really no guaranteed way to store safely (forever) .

POLITRICKS

All political parties in the NT are opposed to the imposition of the dump. It is overwhelmingly arrogant of the Federal Government to attempt to pass this legislation through and thus effectively annex this region for it's own purposes.

Good public policy is developed through negotiation and inclusion- not imposed by governments determined to get their way no matter what.

CONCLUSION

The overriding of existing provisions of federal and territory law that could hinder or delay the dump plan is a disturbing precedent that greatly undermines community confidence in the Commonwealth's actions on this issue - and its future intentions.

This legislation has already been criticised by the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee for its adverse impacts 'on personal rights and liberties'.I urge the Committee to take the time necessary to thoroughly engage with all concerned people and organisations, as only after an extensive period of consultation can a Committee decision hope to represent the views of the public.

This is a decision that requires very, very careful consideration as the consequences stretch far beyond our lifetimes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Government must travel to the NT and initiate dialogue with Traditional Custodians, landholders, Local and Territory Governments and communities living nearby all three of the proposed sites.

I urge Senator Scullion to act in response to the overwhelming community opposition to the NT dump proposal , and the cross the floor and vote against this legislation when it comes back to the Senate for a final vote in December.

REMEMBER.....

This is a matter of intergenerational equity that must be addressed respectfully and responsibly

For future generations,
Natalie Wasley