

Submission to the Standing Committee On Foreign Affairs, Defence And Trade
Inquiry into the Australian Participants in British Nuclear Tests (Treatment) Bill
2006

I was involved in Adelaide to discuss the nuclear issue on Hiroshima Day in a public meeting on the Maralinga tests, with Maralinga survivors and the Nuclear Veterans Association. Whistleblower Avon Hutson and Dr Roger Cross presented insightful analysis and expose. A number of groups, the SA Peace Committee, the unions and UTLC, . There was excellent coverage from investigator reporter Colin James from the Advertiser. we had rather than the expected 50 some 400 attend, with speakers from the Veterans giving moving speeches of the deaths and suffering of those involved. I did not doubt the veracity of their arguments as follows.

The Australian Government sent approx 8000 servicemen and about the same number of civilian contract personnel to be involved in these tests. These men became guinea pigs for the British Government for the express purpose of testing nuclear explosions and radiation effects on the ability of servicemen to function as war machinery. The exposure to radiation was never an "innocent mistake or miscalculation" nor was it due to lack of knowledge regarding the dangers of radiation exposure. Men were ordered to enter into ground zero (point of explosion) immediately following detonation of atomic bombs. Planes flew into and tracked mushroom clouds over Australia taking air samples and photos. Ships and ground crews washed down equipment and themselves with irradiated water. They drank contaminated water while eating food contaminated by dust from the red sand and soil in which they lived. The men worked and maneuvered on Plutonium contaminated soil. They were provided with little or no protective clothing and seldom badged while some badges and dosimeters were falsified or not recorded because of high readings. In spite of this long lived dangerous level of radioactivity, the Australian Government expected the veterans to believe that the test participants were exposed to only minimal nonhazardous levels of radiation. The survivors of these hazardous tests rightly argued that detonating Atomic bombs and working with radioactive materials in contaminated areas is not normal peacetime activity for defence force personnel and contractors.

From that time onwards, I lobbied the Liberal government and ALP members and including the issue of health care for those remaining. I supported the following demands that came from the meeting

"We urge all political parties during the election campaign to adopt the following policy with regard to the two groups of people and their dependants who were exposed to the significant hazard of low level ionising radiation as a result of the 12 atomic bomb tests exploded in Australia, and the highly radioactive minor trials (held subsequent to the atomic bomb explosions at Maralinga) to both Australian military personnel and civilian workers. It should be noted that the total atomic bomb blast equivalent (in TNT) exploded in Australia was the same as 14.5 Hiroshima bombs!

Further, a scientific study be initiated without delay into the effects of 'rainouts' of the radioactive debris from the atomic bomb explosions as the radioactive clouds passed over towns and communities across Australia subsequent to each of the bomb tests. It should be noted that alarming results were found with maternal, fetal and infant mortality in areas that suffered similar rainouts in the USA. Lastly, the British Government be approached to contribute to the compensation of the veterans.

1. Military Nuclear Veterans

i) The current scientific study into mortality and cancer rates among these veterans be pursued with the utmost speed appropriate to the scientific requirements of such a study. The study must include an examination of the somatic cell genetic effects - the hereditary impact of their exposure to radioactive isotopes.

ii) On conclusion of the scientific study compensation be paid without delay, and ongoing medical advice, and genetic counselling be made available to descendents.

iii) The Veterans' Entitlements Act be amended immediately to include the nuclear veterans in order that they can receive the veteran's pension, gold card, and repatriation hospital benefits.

iv) The veterans be awarded the 1945-75 service medal.

2. Civilian Nuclear Veterans

i) The current scientific study into mortality and cancer rates among these veterans be pursued with the utmost speed appropriate to the scientific requirements of such a study. The study must include an examination of the somatic cell genetic effects - the hereditary impact of their exposure to radioactive isotopes.

ii) On conclusion of the scientific study compensation be paid without delay, and ongoing medical advice, and genetic counselling be made available to descendents. "

I see no reason to question these claims and urge the Senate Committee to recommend that the Australian Participants in British Nuclear Tests (Treatment) Bill 2006 is not as ungenerous as it is at the moment.

I note that although some health care is to be made available only to those suffering cancer, it does not extend to dependents.

One more recent outcome, was the government published a list of people at Maralinga and to my surprise I discovered for the first time that my father had been there as an electrical contractor. He died of cancer in 1970 and at the time the

family did not know he had worked at Maralinga: no doubt due to the Official Secrets Act. Later after investigation amongst some of my father's contacts, this was confirmed as was (most distressingly) the early deaths by cancer of many of those contractors in my father's contract team; old friends started to say they suspected it, one saying that she remembered my father talking of seeing the bombs go off. I tried to find out more but as per usual no information at all from the government.

I am aware of the health study but somewhat surprised by the results. I support the submission by physicist and armed forces veteran Jack Lonergan.

I was aware that the government was now considering some form of health care. This is most overdue, by some 36 years!

I urge the Government not to be just strong on rhetoric when it comes to its treatment of the Veterans' community, and not to ignore the recommendations of its own independent reviews that were conducted at great taxpayer expense.

The Senate should insist this Bill extends health care to the dependants. My mother has just passed away and had she received some medical assistance or support at the nursing home it would have been good; e.g. she could have been classified at the same level of health care as her sister who is in a War Veterans Home with I believe lesser cost, as it should be. What about children/grandchildren receiving health care? I fully support this applying to military dependants, but I would want to include the civilian contractors and their dependents. It is the least that could be done by this whole disgraceful saga where apologies or recognition of and compensation for the pain and suffering has still to be made.

I am available to expand on the above if necessary.

I do not know if the Senate committee is going to Adelaide but should do so.

Chris White,
21/6 Macleay St Turner ACT 61619225