

**AUSTRALIAN VETERANS AND DEFENCE
SERVICES COUNCIL INCORPORATED
“ AVADSC ”**

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The Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
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Reference: Secretary, Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade memorandum of 12 October 2006.

Progress of the Nuclear Test Participants Health Study

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission on Australian Participants in British Nuclear Weapons Tests (Treatment) Bill 2006

The Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council's position is based on:

- the dissatisfaction expressed by members of the study's Consultative Forum and the Scientific Advisory Committee with the outcome of the Dosimetry Report. From the nature of the study and the interest taken in it by the Scientific Advisory Committee it goes without saying that the content of the Dosimetry Report is a fundamental ingredient to the outcome of the study and a key factor in determining causality; and the relief offered by Government.
- dissatisfaction with the relief offered to veterans of the British nuclear tests in Australia in being limited to providing free comprehensive health cover for the participants who have cancer or free screening for those who want to be screened for cancer.

The Dosimetry Report

Confidence in the Dosimetry Report is fundamental to the content of and perceptions to be drawn from the study of the Australian Participants in the British Nuclear Test Programme – Cancer Incidence and Mortality Study. There is sufficient evidence that competent scientists have doubts about the integrity of the Dosimetry Report and this can only lead to doubts about the conclusions of the Cancer Incidence and Mortality Study and by extension the Government's commitments to this group of veterans.

The outcome of the Dosimetry Report is that there was no hazard from radiation. This position is not acceptable in the face of the clear evidence of radiation hazard. On Tremouille Island in the Monte Bellos, to this very day, there are signs which say, "Radiation Risk Hazard, do not stay for more than one hour, do not raise dust, do not consume food, do not remove anything from the island. Matters, which need to be investigated include the allegation that contaminated clothing, flying boots and navigation equipment were buried on Woomera Airfield following Operation Totem I. Also there is the allegation that four aircraft were so badly contaminated that they were cut up and the pieces buried.

Further, if there was no radiation hazard why did the Australian Government spend \$104 million on a decontamination of the Taranaki area of Maralinga in the late 1990s? In this context if there was a hazard that necessitated a clean-up, how much more would the hazard have been for the men who were there in the 1950s and 1960s, most of them without proper safety clothing.

The manner in which the Dosimetry Report was produced, give little confidence in the integrity of its content and the conclusions, which are so fundamental to the determination of the government commitment.

Measures to provide Relief and Comfort to Veterans and their Families

AVADSC has expressed a commitment to pursue the action that needs to be taken to bring some relief and comfort to the participants and their families, who have suffered because of exposure to the harmful conditions of these tests. It is the view of the AVADSC membership that merely providing free comprehensive health cover for the participants who have cancer or free screening for those who want to be screened for cancer do not amount to responding positively to the needs of Australian armed forces personnel and families who were placed in harms way and suffered because of participation in the Nuclear Test Programme. Furthermore noting the time taken to complete this study and that the tests were conducted in the 1950s and the 1960s there is for the AVADSC membership the important issue of retrospectivity of entitlements when access to benefits is affected by delays

in administration or the completion of studies. This has been raised on a number of occasions by AVADSC.

AVADSC would attach importance to a sensitive handling of the needs of Australian armed forces personnel, whose medical condition can be attributed to exposures during the British Atomic Test programme, and their widows. This would include retrospective payment of compensation entitlements derived from the earliest awareness of the conditions caused by these tests.

Conduct of the Enquiry

Because of the debilitated condition of many of the veterans the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, which is conducting this enquiry should give consideration to holding public hearings at locations which can make it easier for those with competent knowledge and experience to give evidence.

Yours sincerely

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National President