

Parliamentary Paper  
No. 146/1987

The Parliament of the  
Commonwealth of Australia

INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF  
IONIZING RADIATION

House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on  
Environment and  
Conservation

Report that the Committee  
has been unable to complete  
its inquiry

June 1987

The Commonwealth Government Printer  
Canberra 1987

© Commonwealth of Australia 1987  
ISBN 0 644 06528 1

Printed by Authority by the Commonwealth Government Printer

## Terms of Reference of the Committee

That a standing committee be appointed to inquire into and report on -

- (a) environmental aspects of legislative and administrative measures which ought to be taken in order to ensure the wise and effective management of the Australian environment and of Australia's natural resources, and
- (b) such other matters relating to the environment and conservation and the management of Australia's natural resources as are referred to it by -
  - (i) the Minister responsible for those matters, or
  - (ii) resolution of the House.

## Inquiry Terms of Reference

That the Committee inquire into and report on the use of ionizing radiation for commercial sterilisation, disinfestation, food preservation and other purposes with particular reference to -

- . human health and safety,
- . environmental impacts, and
- . the adequacy of assessment and regulatory procedures.

## Membership of the Committee

Chairman:	Mr P. Milton, MP
Deputy Chairman:	Mr A.P. Webster, MP
Members:	Mr R.L. Chynoweth, MP Mr R.F. Edwards, MP Mr P.S. Fisher, MP Mr G. Gear, MP Ms J. McHugh, MP Mr C.G. Miles, MP
Secretary to the Committee:	Mr J. Cummins

**REPORT ON UNFINISHED INQUIRY INTO  
THE USE OF IONIZING RADIATION**

1. On 23 September 1986 the Committee passed the following resolution:
  - . That the Committee inquire into and report on the use of ionizing radiation for commercial sterilisation, disinfestation, food preservation and other purposes with particular reference to:
    - . human health and safety,
    - . environmental impacts, and
    - . adequacy of assessment and regulatory procedures.
2. The Committee has held public hearings in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide with final hearings planned for the winter adjournment. The Committee had hoped to table its report in October or November this year. Over 2000 pages of evidence have been taken to date.
3. The inquiry is an important one and has generated a great deal of public interest. Many hundreds of petitions containing tens of thousands of signatures opposing food irradiation have been presented to the House of Representatives. In addition the Committee has received many submissions from concerned citizens on this controversial issue. The Minister for Health has indicated that the Commonwealth Government will not make any decision relating to food irradiation until such time as the Committee's report has been presented to the House.
4. A number of reports have been produced overseas, some endorsing the process of food irradiation as safe and others which express serious concerns. The Australian Consumers' Association has recently presented a report on Food Irradiation to the Minister for Health. The Committee has not had the opportunity to examine that report in detail but notes that it gives qualified support for the introduction of food irradiation in Australia. These conclusions however were reached without the benefit of a public hearing process which is one of the major strengths of a Parliamentary

inquiry. The Committee's inquiry with its access to information from Government departments and instrumentalities as well as the general public has gathered valuable information which together with evidence still to be obtained would enable a balanced report to be produced.

5. It is important that the inquiry commenced by the Committee in the 34th Parliament be completed by a Committee in the 35th Parliament.
6. Accordingly the Committee recommends that:
  - (i) the inquiry into the use of ionizing radiation for food preservation and other purposes be continued by -
    - (a) a Committee established in the 35th Parliament with responsibilities for matters relating to the environment and conservation; or
    - (b) a Select Committee established specifically to examine the use of ionizing radiation for food preservation and other purposes; and
  - (ii) a decision relating to the introduction of food irradiation in Australia be deferred until the Committee appointed in the 35th Parliament has reported.

(PETER MILTON)  
Chairman

June 1987

