

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry Portfolio
Budget Estimates 2014-15
2-3 June 2014

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY

TOPIC: Radioactive Waste Storage Facility at Muckaty

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 3 June 2014, page 44)

QUESTION No.: BI-69

Senator LUDLAM: Can I take it from that—this maybe a straightforward policy question straight to you, Minister—that the government's present policy is for a national centralised radioactive waste dump at Muckaty. What will you do if the court throws that out and finds the nomination is invalid?

Senator Ronaldson: I certainly cannot pre-empt what the decision might be, so to that extent the second part of your question is theoretical. As to the first part, I would not want to mislead you in relation to the specific policy—this is not my portfolio area, as you will appreciate. So, unless the officers at the table are able to provide some further assistance, I think it is probably better that I take that on notice. I am sure the minister's office is listening. I am happy to get that to you as quickly as possible so I do not misrepresent the government's position.

Senator LUDLAM: I presume the officers at the table are not working completely in the dark, so to be very clear—because I do not think this is a question that should be taken on notice: is it present Commonwealth government policy, as far as the officers at the table understand it, to proceed with the construction of the radioactive waste dump on Muckaty Land Trust land?

Ms Beauchamp: Can I say that there is a commitment to pursue the feasibility study around a long-term solution to radioactive waste storage. I think the sight at Muckaty was a volunteered site, so I would have to take it on notice. I think a site has not been finalised, so, in a sense, they are two separate issues. One is the development of a long-term storage solution, and I think the site options probably need to remain open. If there are other nominations coming forward, I would have to seek advice from the minister and government on whether they would be ruled out.

Senator LUDLAM: All I would say is that they are not seen as being separate issues for the old people of the Barkly and of that region around Tennant Creek and Muckaty, who have had this thing hanging over their heads for eight years. It is not seen as separate by them. Is it that difficult to ascertain? What I am trying to do is work out whether the government is proceeding with Muckaty and has a decision point that is yet ahead of it depending on what the Federal Court determines. Or are options actually genuinely open? That is a reasonably straightforward question.

Senator Ronaldson: And I think, so that I do not in any way give you information that is not correct, we will take that on notice so that, if it requires any clarification, that can be done.

Senator LUDLAM: Maybe I will put the second one as a supplementary question on notice—whether or not the Commonwealth intends to proceed with the nomination even if the Northern Land Council is found to have breached the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, which is what is being considered.

Senator Ronaldson: Again, it is a hypothetical question. We have court cases before us. I think, quite frankly, that we should not be discussing either those or the potential outcome of those at the present time. I am sure you will understand that.

ANSWER

The Australian Government responded to the Northern Land Council's request not proceed with consideration of the volunteered site at Muckaty Station and on 20 June 2014 all parties to the Federal Court matter agreed to settle the case regarding the nominated site at Muckaty Station.

The Government will seek nominations for suitable volunteer sites from landowners anywhere in Australia, in accordance with the *National Radioactive Waste Management Act 2012*.