



AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR ASSOCIATION INC

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*Member of the Pacific Nuclear Council
Member of the International Nuclear Societies Council
Affiliate Member of the World Nuclear Association*

Submission to

Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts

INQUIRY INTO THE COMMONWEALTH RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT (REPEAL AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENT) BILL 2008

Australian Nuclear Association (ANA)

The Australian Nuclear Association (ANA) is an independent incorporated scientific institution made up of individuals drawn from the professions, business, government and universities, with an interest in nuclear scientific and technical topics. The ANA provides a forum for presentation, exchange and dissemination of information on the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology through the holding of regular technical meetings and national and international conferences.

Radioactive Waste in Australia

Radioactive waste has been generated in Australia as byproduct of a wide range of beneficial uses of radioactivity and radiation over many years, including operation of research reactors, production and use of medical isotopes for therapy and treatment, industrial processes and research.

Extensive national and international experience demonstrates that radioactive waste can be safely managed and stored. In many countries, the disposal of low and intermediate level radioactive waste is a standard process; many overseas disposal facilities are designed for over 500,000 cubic metres of radioactive waste; very much more than the less than 5,000 cubic meters of non-mining radioactive waste in Australia.

The ANA supports the establishment of a radioactive waste management facility for the radioactive waste from all Commonwealth agencies. There would be many advantages if the same facility could be made available to manage, store and dispose of the radioactive waste from the States and Territories to avoid duplicate facilities being established around the country.

ANA Opposes the Bill to Repeal the 2005 CRWM Act

The Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management (CRWM) Act 2005 made provisions for the selection of a site, the establishment and operation of a radioactive waste management

facility in the Northern Territory for the radioactive waste from Commonwealth agencies. The CRWM Act 2005 strengthened the Commonwealth's legal ability to develop the proposed Commonwealth radioactive waste management facility in the Northern Territory. The CRWM Act 2005 provided legislative authority to undertake the various activities associated with the proposed facility and to restrict the application of laws that might hinder the development and operation of the facility. The aim of the Act was to prevent many of the un-necessary procedural delays and hurdles that the previous attempt to site a National Radioactive Waste Repository faced before that proposal even reached the EIS and licensing process.

The project to characterise and prepare a proposal for the proposed facility has been underway for 3 years and should be allowed to be completed. Site characterisation and environmental studies at the four sites and the volunteering of the additional site by the Northern Land Council occurred under the 2005 CRWM Act.

The ANA urges parliament not to support the 2008 Bill because it would prevent proper consideration of the benefits and costs of a Commonwealth radioactive waste facility in the Northern Territory. The ANA supports allowing the preparation of a proposal for the radioactive waste management facility, including necessary site characterisation and environmental studies. Under the 2005 CRWM Act, the facility will be subject to the approval and licensing provisions of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act 1998 and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. This means that environmental, social and safety and net benefit issues must be addressed and assessed in the EIS and licensing processes.

Senator Ludham in his second reading speech on the 2008 Bill argued that "The decisions we take today about Australia's radioactive waste - how it should be stored, where it should be stored, whether it should be transported and centralised - should reflect the best science we have at our disposal now, as well as the best democratic and transparent processes that governments and citizens can utilise in today's world." The ANA agrees with this statement, but it is not consistent with Senator Ludham's attempt to repeal the 2005 CRWM Act. The 2008 Bill is an attempt to stop the process of collecting site data, preparing plans for a facility and developing a safety case. A process that reflects the best science and is transparent would allow preparation of the proposal to be completed so that environmental, safety and social issues can be clearly and properly assessed.

Recommendation

The Australian Nuclear Association (ANA) strongly recommends that Parliament not support the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management (Repeal and Consequential Amendment) Bill 2008.

Australian Nuclear Association
26 October 2008