

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et la liberté
Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad
Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit

Consultative Status with United Nations ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO

Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO and UNICEF
International Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland
Australian Section Office, Adelaide
PO Box 345 Rundle Mall, 5000
(08) 8296 4357 Email: wilpfaustralia@wilpf.org.au



18 August 2008

Hon Martin Ferguson MP
Minister for Resources and Energy
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Further re: Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005

Thank you for your reply of 30 June 2008 to ours of 28 May 2008, regarding the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005. We write now once more on behalf of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to seek clarification on your reply.

We understand that the ALP went to the last election with a clear election promise to repeal the legislation enacted by the previous Howard Government on the siting of a national nuclear waste repository in the Northern Territory. We also understand that the Rudd Government has failed to repeal this legislation.

We wish to seek further clarification on the government's views on any potential role envisaged for a national waste repository for nuclear material. We stress once more that it our understanding that, in the lead-up to last November's election, the ALP did not undertake to institute a national waste repository; some even understood this commitment on the part of the ALP to be that, in government, the ALP would not institute such a national nuclear waste repository.

While we can well understand that there may be some necessity within Australia to now manage radioactive waste material that has been generated through Lucas Heights, we are alarmed by the possibility that by instituting a national nuclear waste repository, the door would be opened to making the Australian continent not only a national, but also an international, nuclear waste repository. We observe that policy

levers are set such that the export of Australian uranium ore is likely to increase in volume over the life of the Rudd Government. We also observe that internationally, pressure is being exerted for nuclear material generated from Australian uranium to be processed offshore and, for a fee, the resultant waste returned to the Australian continent. Former ALP Prime Minister, Bob Hawke is not alone within the ALP in his advocacy of such a proposal. We firmly believe that taking such a step is fraught with dangers, which your reply of 30 June neither identifies nor addresses. Thus, while we applaud your decision not to take “piecemeal steps or decisions” in addressing the problem, we seek clarification as to what exactly this national approach under consideration by you will and will not cover.

More worrying to us at this time though is the consultation process alluded to in your reply, which (you write) includes state and territory governments and indigenous and local communities. The Australian people are a stakeholder as well, and seem to have been left out. In our view, it appears that these nuclear issues are often swept into the great outback of Australia, away from the populace, out of mind. Yet, as key stakeholders in this process, we are greatly opposed to nuclear weapons and nuclear power generation. One of the key reasons for this opposition is the issue of nuclear waste, and the fact that there is no long-term storage solution or strategy that science has shown will work for the millions of years required for high-grade waste.

We seek your assurances that the Australian people as key stakeholders in this issue will be consulted as part of your decision making process. We also seek an assurance that your review will be wide and thorough.

We thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell
Joint National Coordinators

CC.: Hon Kevin Rudd
Hon Jenny Macklin
Senator John Faulkner