



**OFFICE OF
THE HON MARTIN FERGUSON AM MP
MINISTER FOR RESOURCES AND ENERGY
MINISTER FOR TOURISM**

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08 SEP 2008

Ms Cathy Picone and Ms Ruth Russell
Joint National Coordinators
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
PO Box 345
RUNDLE MALL SA 5000

Dear Ms Picone and Ms Russell

Thank you for your letter of 18 August 2008 to the Minister concerning radioactive waste management and repeal of the *Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005*. The Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf.

The Rudd Labor Government's commitments with regard to radioactive waste management were made in the context of the Australian Labor Party's National Platform rather than the 2007 election campaign. The National Platform commits a Labor Government to repeal the *Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005* and identify a suitable site for a radioactive waste management facility using a reformed site selection process.

The radioactive waste produced in Australia is not confined to waste arising from the operations of the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). Use of radioactive materials in medicine, industry and research is widespread throughout Australia. The small quantities of waste that arise from these beneficial uses of radioactivity must be carefully managed in accordance with Australia's international obligations.

Establishing a national repository will not lead to Australia importing radioactive waste. It has been the policy of successive Australian Governments that Australia will not accept other countries' radioactive waste. The Rudd Government is firmly committed to this policy which is enforced through the *Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956* under which radioactive waste is a prohibited import. Countries that use Australian uranium to generate electricity are expected to make their own arrangements for disposal of the resulting high level nuclear waste. There is no moral or legal reason for Australia to accept such waste.

A decision by the Government to site a facility will only be made after proper stakeholder consultation. Furthermore, wherever a facility is located it will be subject to strict regulatory controls under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and the *Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act 1998*. These laws require the Government to demonstrate that the facility will have no adverse impact on people or the

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environment. Assessment under the EPBC Act provides the opportunity for public comment on a proposal for consideration by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts in determining whether it can proceed or not.

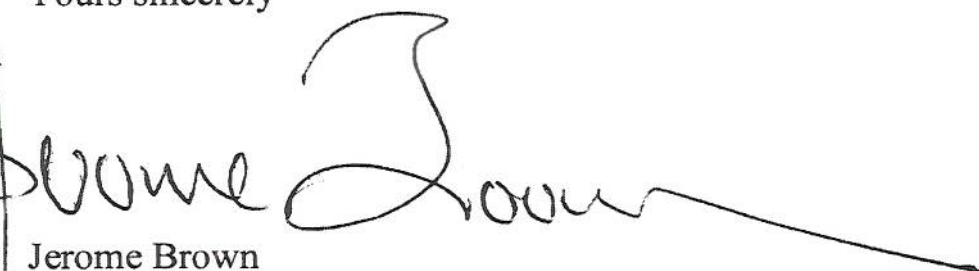
There is an international consensus at the scientific and technical level that the technology exists to safely dispose of high level radioactive waste by deep disposal in stable geological formations. A number of countries, including the United States, Finland and Sweden, have made significant progress towards developing deep geological disposal facilities. Of 39 countries that have significant nuclear waste inventories, 25 have opted for geological disposal as a long-term policy option and a further six have expressed a preference for geological disposal.

The Rudd Government is not considering nuclear power as part of Australia's energy portfolio in view of our abundant energy resources and remains opposed to the development of a nuclear power industry in Australia. The Government realises that nuclear energy is an important part of the energy mix in countries not as fortunate as Australia in having other clean energy options. As the world's second largest producer and exporter of uranium, Australia has a leadership role in ensuring the sustainable development and responsible use of this important energy source.

To ensure that Australian uranium is not diverted to weapons programs, the Government only permits uranium exports to countries with which we have a bilateral nuclear safeguards agreement, that are signatories to the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* and are committed to non-proliferation policies. The nuclear safeguards regime applied to Australian uranium enables it to be accounted for throughout the nuclear fuel cycle.

Thank you again for providing your view on these matters to the Minister and the Government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jerome Brown', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jerome Brown
Assistant Adviser