

Dear Committee,

I write on behalf of the Anti-Nuclear Alliance of Western Australia to support the above-named bill, put forward in the Senate on 25th September by Senator Scott Ludlam.

ANAWA is happy to support this bill to repeal the CRWMA Act of 2005, and the amendments to it, passed in 2006.

It is a very sorry story – this imposition of a nuclear waste dump on an unwilling group of people in the Northern Territory. Their confidence in any government must have been shattered completely by now:

1. the Howard Government promised that there would be full consultation prior to announcing a site for a national radioactive waste dump - BROKEN PROMISE
2. The ALP, when in Opposition, declared at their 2007 conference that there would not only be a repeal of the 2005 Act, but that there would be full consultation and transparency, and ensured that there would be compliance with the Aboriginal Land Rights Northern Territory Act, and that a nuclear waste facility would not be imposed on any community, anywhere in Australia (chapter 5) - PROMISE UNFULFILLED

This is why it is important that Senator Ludlam has brought forward this bill, now, in an attempt to encourage the Government to act on its promises. Obviously when in Opposition, the ALP found the Howard Government's 2005 ACT, and the machinations of the Minister for Science, Hon. Julie Bishop, to be arrogant and shameful, to use some of their descriptions. But in the eleven months since the Labor Party was elected, they have nothing to re-assure the people of Mucharty Station in particular, that their grievances are being addressed. There has been a long silence. But there have been numerous occasions on which the people of Mucharty have tried to present their point of view to the previous and current governments. Often, they have not been received, let alone heard.

Of course, something must be done to deal with the legacy of the nuclear industry in this country. Safe repositories must be found, which will be secure for a very long time. But it should not be Aboriginal communities which have to bear this burden – they have already suffered from the British nuclear testing programme of the fifties and sixties. That they could have been considered expendable then was deeply shameful, but the trend continues, and it is still shameful.

To stop producing more nuclear waste would be the first constructive step that any government could take. Nuclear waste needs to be stored near where it is produced (and this goes for the global nuclear industry as well as for the national scene): this contaminated material is too dangerous to be shipped around the nation, or the globe. Most of it should be stored in above-ground containers so that it can be regularly monitored, as corrosion of containers is a common occurrence. It must be clearly labeled, so that it is not conveniently "forgotten." This is a very difficult issue for the world to face, but an industry which after sixty years, has totally failed to be responsible for its waste, is a failed technology, in our view. Much of the Australian waste needing to be placed is low and medium level waste which is not as dangerous as high level waste. But it still must be managed, and should not be sitting around, unguarded, unlabelled in warehouses around the country.

There has been little honesty and no transparency in any Australian Government's dealing with the nuclear industry to date. Otherwise, we would not have a dodgy Argentinian technology failing at the Lucas Heights Reactor in Sydney's suburbs. The facility should have

been closed, not re-built. The siting of the original research reactor is a case in point, with future land uses not being adequately considered.

Senator Ludlam's Bill calls for the kind of open-ness and transparency which has far eluded the nuclear industry, worldwide. No one would suggest that this is an easy issue with which to grapple, but the community must have its say. There are many stages to this process, but the ALP Government has dragged its feet on the first point – repeal of the draconian CRWMA Act of 2005. Minority parties should not have to do the government's work for them, but seeing Minister Ferguson is so slow in presenting a repeal bill, I hope that the government will support the Bill put forward by Senator Ludlam. The people of Australia would see this as an important first step in the process.

Senator Carr was treading on dangerous territory when he alluded to the agreement of the Northern Land Council to the Muckarty Station site. Often Aboriginal Land Councils are pressured by vested interests to agree to proposals which are not accepted by all their constituents. Sometimes this is due to extreme hardship following cuts in government programmes, or the imposition of government programmes, again without consultation, which are distressing to the recipients. Certainly, the people at the ground level, have not given any agreement to either Government or Northern Land Council for their land to be desecrated by a nuclear waste dump. We should listen to them, in the spirit of the apology given by the Prime Minister on February 13th. Otherwise, this will be yet another instance for a big sorry in the future.

Jo Vallentine,
Co-convenor, ANAWA