



# NUCLEAR WASTE

## A PROCESS NOT POSTCODE APPROACH

*The Greens' plan for world's best practice in nuclear waste management*

There are no long-term storage solutions for nuclear waste, however, Australia's accrued nuclear waste must be stored, transported and managed in a transparent, consensual and scientific manner.

There are no long-term storage solutions for nuclear waste, which is why the Australian Greens believe that nuclear industry activities should be ceased entirely.

The Greens will continue to stand up against the idea promoted by the Pangea Corporation and most recently Bob Hawke that Australia should become the world's nuclear waste dump.

Each nation must responsibly deal with their nuclear mistakes, not transport their toxic waste 'out of sight out of mind.'

The old parties have legislated to impose nuclear waste upon unwilling Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Their preferred site at Muckaty station, 120km north of Tennant Creek, is on an earthquake fault and prone to heavy flooding in the wet season.

The Muckaty proposal is currently being contested in the Federal Court by the indigenous peoples who live in the area on the grounds they have not been consulted.

In order to establish a process for site selection based on science, consultation and consent, the Australian Greens propose the establishment of an Independent Commission on the Long Term Safe Storage, Transport and Management of Australia's Radioactive Waste.

### > WE MUST FACE UP TO THE NUCLEAR MISTAKES OF THE PAST

The Greens know that Australia must responsibly deal with the nuclear mistakes of the past which have generated a total of

- 4020 cubic metres of so-called low-level and short-lived intermediate radioactive waste
- Approximately 600 cubic metres of long lived waste in this country
- 32 cubic metres of spent research reactor fuel that is returning to Australia from reprocessing in France and the UK in 2015-16.

An Independent Commission would apply world's best practice to responsibly deal with Australia's radioactive waste inventory, which will have to involve a more sophisticated management regime than dumping the waste containers in a shed on a cattle station - the current irresponsible approach of the old parties.

**The Australian Greens will provide \$2.7 million to fund an Independent Commission on the Long Term Safe Storage, transport and Management of Australia's Radioactive Waste to deliver:**

- The best practice model for radioactive waste management in Australia;
- An audit of the volumes of nuclear waste and the activity and contractual arrangements in place for the Commonwealth, States and Territories;
- An inventory of the waste management procedures currently being used by States and the Commonwealth;
- Community, independent expert and industry consultations and recommendations that are publicly canvassed;
- Recommended procedures for ongoing scrutiny of the implementation of the decisions arrived at through this proper independent process.

**The Commission will:**

- Consist of 5 people appointed by the Governor-General on a full time basis;
- Be genuinely independent, informing itself in any way it sees fit, consulting with anyone it sees fit, receiving written and oral information, conducting public seminars, establishing working groups, and not be subject to the control or direction of the Minister; and
- Report to the Minister in 15 months.

The fact is that, whether we like it or not, we have radioactive waste in this country, and we must responsibly deal with the consequences of irresponsible decisions made in the past.



## > AUSTRALIA CAN UPHOLD INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

Australian can learn from other countries and institutions about principles of transparency, participation and accountability on nuclear waste. Australia is either a member of these institutions and treaties, or we have strong relationships with these countries considered to be like-minded on many fronts, which it makes it all the more regrettable that Australia is lagging behind on this aspect of international best practice.

## > THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

The International Atomic Energy Agency stated in 2007 that governments that have used undemocratic methods lacking public involvement and acceptance regarding nuclear waste "had to reconsider their programs". The IAEA study concluded that "reassessment can become necessary because past decisions were not reached through socially acceptable process." According to the IAEA, there is a need for, "public involvement in the decision making process; adequate financial provisions; clear, integrated, plans on how spent fuel and radioactive waste will be managed to ensure continued safety into the future, and as this could be for decades, to avoid creating a legacy situation that would impose undue burden on future generations..."<sup>1</sup>

## > THE UN JOINT CONVENTION ON THE SAFETY OF SPENT FUEL MANAGEMENT

Australia is party to the agreement which notes that "public consultation on radioactive waste management strategies was not only a good practice to follow, but was also essential for the development of a successful and sustainable policy."<sup>2</sup>

## > OECD NUCLEAR ENERGY AGENCY

The OAEAC recognises, "that public, and especially the local public, are not willing to commit irreversibly to technical choices on which they have insufficient understanding and control". The Nuclear Energy Agency's report on the *Decommissioning and Dismantling of Nuclear Facilities, Status, Approaches, Challenges* stated, "It is openly accepted that openness and transparency are essential for the winning of public approval...The local public is increasingly demanding to be involved in such planning and this may accelerate the introduction of concepts such as "stepwise decision making". The challenge for the future, therefore, will be satisfactory

development of systems of consulting the public, and local communities in particular, and the creation of sources of information in which the public can have full confidence."<sup>3</sup>

## > THE UK

The UK government's Committee on Radioactive Waste Management's stated that, "There is a growing recognition that it is not ethically acceptable for a society to impose a radioactive waste facility on an unwilling community." The Committee sets out a very detailed set of recommendations on how to proceed with the siting of a radioactive waste facility.

*Recommendation 11:* Willingness to participate should be supported by the provision of community packages that are designed both to facilitate participation in the short term and to ensure that a radioactive waste facility is acceptable to the host community in the long term. Participation should be based on the expectation that the well-being of the community will be enhanced.

*Recommendation 12:* Experience from the UK and abroad clearly demonstrates the failure of earlier 'top down' mechanisms (often referred to as Decide-Announce-Defend) to implement long-term waste management facilities. It is generally considered that a voluntary process is essential to ensure equity, efficiency and the likelihood of successfully completing the process. There is a growing recognition that it is not ethically acceptable for a society to impose a radioactive waste facility on an unwilling community.<sup>4</sup>

## > THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU requires member states to adhere to certain social principles in terms of site selection. The European Union *Inventory of Best Practice in the Decommissioning of Nuclear Installations*, concluded, "Final waste repositories must be sited where local communities are willing to give their consent to these facilities for many generations. Experience has shown that, without this consent the project will sooner or later be cancelled, stopped or indefinitely delayed – one way or the other. Therefore siting must focus on three key issues: the safety of the repository system; the impact on local image and socio-economy, the importance of public acceptance and how it can be reached."<sup>5</sup> From the citations above, it is clearly difficult to miss the emphasis placed by the IAEA, by the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency, International Commission on Radiological Protection, EU, and the UK on winning public confidence and obtaining social licence and community consent for the siting of radioactive waste facilities.

<sup>3</sup> NAE OECD <http://www.oecd-nea.org/rwm/reports/2002/3714-decommissioning.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> CORWM <http://corwm.decc.gov.uk/assets/corwm/pre-nov%202007%20doc%20archive/plenary%20papers/2006/20-21%20june%202006/1781%20-%20implementation%20recommendations%20following%20pse4.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> EU 30 June 2006, [http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/decommissioning/doc/05\\_2006\\_11\\_decommissioning\\_best\\_practice\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/decommissioning/doc/05_2006_11_decommissioning_best_practice_report.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> IAEA-TECDOC-1566, October 2007, Factors Affecting Public and Political Acceptance for the Implementation of Geological Disposal [http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/te\\_1566\\_web.pdf](http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/te_1566_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Joint Convention opened for signature on 29 Sept 1997 and entered into force on 18 June 2001 <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Conventions/jointconv.html>