

NUCLEAR FREEWAYS



In February 2010 the federal Labor Government announced its intention to impose a national radioactive waste dump at Muckaty, 120 kms north of Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. There are many concerns with the proposal, including:

- * The opposition of many Traditional Owners to the proposal, and the unwillingness of the Government to listen to their concerns or to include them in decision-making processes.
- * Draconian legislation which overrides Aboriginal heritage and environmental protection laws as well as overriding all state/territory laws.
- * The failure of the Government to establish the need for a national repository.
- * The failure of the Government to carry out a fair site-selection process.
- * The approach is in direct conflict with federal ALP policy and clear election promises on radioactive waste.

The Nuclear Freeways Campaign works to inform and support communities along potential transport routes between Australia's main radioactive waste producer – the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor site south of Sydney – and the NT.

A Brief History of Nuclear Freeways

Friends of the Earth launched the Nuclear Freeways project 10 years ago. The aim was to link community concerns about the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor in southern Sydney with a proposed radioactive waste dump near Woomera in South Australia. The project involved extensive engagement with local councils, media and community groups along the transport corridor between Lucas Heights and Woomera.

Many councils along the transport corridor passed resolutions opposing the unnecessary trucking of nuclear waste through their communities.

The NSW Parliament held a dedicated Parliamentary Inquiry into radioactive waste management. This resulted in a report that was highly critical of the Coalition Government's handling of this contentious issue. The report is posted at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/nuclearwaste.

Sustained state government, Indigenous and community opposition forced the Coalition Government to abandon plans for a national radioactive waste dump in SA in 2004.



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More information on Nuclear Freeways and the proposed dump:

- * Nuclear Freeways www.nuclearfreeways.org.au
- * Friends of the Earth, Sydney www.sydney.foe.org.au/projects/nuclear-free
- * Friends of the Earth, Australia www.foe.org.au/anti-nuclear/issues/oz/nontdump
- * Beyond Nuclear Initiative www.beyondnuclearinitiative.com
- * Federal Government www.radioactivewaste.gov.au

DUMPING ON MUCKATY TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Federal Resources Minister Martin Ferguson claims that Ngapa Traditional Owners support the nomination of the Muckaty site. However he knows that many of them oppose the dump.

He received a letter opposing the dump in May 2009 signed by 25 Ngapa Traditional Owners and 32 Traditional Owners from other Muckaty groups.

While some members of the Muckaty Land Trust support a national waste dump in return for cash

benefits and access to improved services, many do not. Traditional Owners have initiated a legal challenge against the nomination of the Muckaty site.

Senior ALP ministers including Jenny Macklin, Kim Carr, Peter Garrett and Warren Snowdon have acknowledged the opposition of many Muckaty Traditional Owners.



Muckaty Traditional Owners at Senate Inquiry, Darwin.



Muckaty Traditional Owner Dianne Stokes with family.

Muckaty Voices' is a 10-minute video documentary that tells the story of the Muckaty Traditional Owners opposed to a radioactive waste dump on their country. It can be viewed online at youtube.com or www.beyondnuclearinitiative.wordpress.com/video or a DVD can be posted to you, contact Natalie Wasley from the Arid Lands Environment Centre: natwasley@alec.org.au, 04299 00774.

Muckaty Traditional Owner Dianne Stokes says: *"We made the video throughout the Warlmanpa land. It is all of the Milwayi story. Along with that, we have some songs and dances to represent the country. Martin Ferguson has avoided us and ignored our letters but he knows very well how we feel. He has been arrogant and secretive and he thinks he has gotten away with his plan but in fact he has a big fight on his hands."*

DUMPING ON DEMOCRACY

Federal Resources Minister Martin Ferguson is driving the plan for a nuclear dump at Muckaty in the NT. The legislation he has put forward – the National Radioactive Waste Management Bill – is heavy-handed and undemocratic. It overrides the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1984 and the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 in relation to site selection, and it overrides any current or future state/territory laws which could impede the waste dump plan. Local councils and communities are given no rights under the legislation. To add insult to injury, procedural fairness and appeal rights are curtailed by the legislation.

The NT Central Land Council says the Government is pursuing "an approach characterised by the desire to find a politically expedient solution, contempt for state and Territory laws, and disregard for decision making processes enshrined in the Land Rights Act."



The Federal Government plans to ignore and override legislation passed in the NT Parliament which seeks to ban the imposition of nuclear dumps – the Northern Territory Nuclear Waste Transport, Storage and Disposal (Prohibition) Act 2004. The NT Government remains steadfastly opposed to the dump plan.

"Public consultation should establish public consent – not the consent of a handful of people but broad-based public consent."
NT Chief Minister Paul Henderson.

NUCLEAR WASTE HAZARDS

The Government wants to bury lower-level wastes in shallow trenches and store long-lived intermediate-level waste above ground at Muckaty. No progress has been made towards the final disposal of long-lived intermediate-level waste (via deep geological disposal) so the planned 'interim' storage in the NT could stretch many decades into the future.

Nuclear engineers Alan Parkinson and John Large have warned that the proposed NT dump would be attractive to terrorists wanting to make a 'dirty bomb', a radioactive weapon delivered by conventional means. Similar hazards also apply to nuclear waste transportation. In July 2006, a reporter from the UK Daily Mirror succeeded in planting a fake bomb on a train carrying nuclear waste in north-west London.

The NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into radioactive waste found there "is no doubt that the transportation of radioactive waste increases the

risk of accident or incident – including some form of terrorist intervention".

ANSTO has acknowledged that there are 1-2 accidents or 'incidents' every year involving the transportation of radioactive materials to and from the Lucas Heights reactor plant.

The following table lists some of the radionuclides contained in nuclear fuel reprocessing waste:

NUCLEAR WASTE	HALF-LIFE
Plutonium-238	88 years
Americium-242m	152 years
Americium-241	432 years
Americium-243	7,380 years
Plutonium-239	24,065 years
Uranium-234	244,500 years
Uranium-235	703 million years
Uranium-238	4.46 billion years

"There is very limited capacity within the Northern Territory hospital network outside of Darwin to respond to any radioactive waste incident or accident. ... The Port of Darwin does not have the resource capacity (expertise or equipment) to respond to a radioactive incident.

NT Government submission to 2010 Senate Inquiry

AUSTRALIA'S NUCLEAR WASTE

Measured by radioactivity, spent nuclear fuel reprocessing waste from Lucas Heights reactors accounts for over 90% of the waste the Government wants to dump in the NT. Although the volume of this waste is relatively small – some tens of cubic metres – it is by far the most radioactive material.

Other waste from Lucas Heights that the Government wants to dump in the NT includes:

- * Over 5,000 drums of low-level radioactive waste.
- * Over 200 cubic metres of intermediate-level solid waste, some with 'unknown radioactive inventory'.
- * Several thousand cubic metres of radioactive 'non-compactable contaminated items', e.g. materials from decommissioned Lucas Heights

reactors, pipes, machinery, etc.

* About 10 cubic metres of solidified molybdenum-99 long-lived intermediate-level waste.

* Over 800 drums of 'historical wastes' including radioactive thorium, beryllium and uranium.

Waste from sources other than Lucas Heights includes:

* Over 2000 cubic metres of radioactive contaminated soil currently stored at Woomera.

* Other Commonwealth Defence Department and CSIRO 'historic' radioactive waste. Approximate volumes are 210 cubic metres of low level radioactive waste and 35 cubic metres of intermediate level radioactive waste.

DOES YOUR COMMUNITY HAVE AN ADEQUATE EMERGENCY SERVICES PLAN FOR RADIOACTIVE SPILLS?

Contact your local council.

Find your local council website at:

www.lgsa.org.au/www/html/134-council-websites.asp

TRANSPORT ROUTES

A government-commissioned 2009 report on possible transport routes to the proposed NT dump site is posted at <http://tiny.cc/vl2yk>. The options for transport from Lucas Heights include:

1. Trucking from Lucas Heights through western NSW, SA, Port Wakefield Rd, Stuart Hwy to NT.
2. As above but also through Adelaide.
3. Trucking through northern NSW, Queensland, NT.
4. Trucking from Lucas Heights to Cronulla (Sydney), train to Adelaide, train to NT.

For spent fuel reprocessing waste returned from Scotland and France, the government plans to ship this waste to Darwin Port then to truck (and possibly also train) it south to the dump site.



Truck-train collision, NT, December 2006.

A RESPONSIBLE APPROACH TO RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT

1. Waste minimisation

Firstly, it needs to be shown that radioactive waste is not being produced unnecessarily – that the benefits outweigh the risks. The Government has not even attempted to demonstrate a net benefit for the proposed nuclear dump.

2. All options for radioactive waste management should be considered

All options for radioactive waste management need to be considered – not just ‘remote’ repositories (always more remote for some people than for others).

The option of ongoing storage at the Lucas Heights site needs to be independently assessed. All relevant organisations have acknowledged that this is a viable option including Mr Ferguson’s

own department, the regulator ARPANSA, the Australian Nuclear Association, and ANSTO itself.

"ANSTO is capable of handling and storing wastes for long periods of time. There is no difficulty with that."

Dr Ron Cameron, ANSTO.

3. Site selection processes must be fair and transparent.

If a site selection process for a waste management facility is required, it ought to be based on scientific and environmental criteria, as well as on the principle of community consent. When the federal Bureau of Resource Sciences conducted a national repository site selection study in the 1990s, the Muckatya area did not even make the short-list as a “suitable” site for further investigation.

NUCLEAR MEDICINE

The Government’s claim that most of the waste to be sent to the NT is a by-product of nuclear medicine is false. The Medical Association for Prevention of War notes that the government has been “peddling a lie” by claiming that the nuclear dump would in any way facilitate the practice of nuclear medicine. (See www.mapw.org.au/nuclear-chain/nuclear-medicine.)

