

April 17, 2008

Rudd and Ferguson to dump election promise?

The Beyond Nuclear Initiative (BNI) today expressed concern that Resource Minister Martin Ferguson is holding out on ALP commitments regarding the NT radioactive waste dump, and called on Prime Minister Rudd to bring the Minister's statements back into line with ALP policy.

Despite clear pre-election statements that Labor would repeal the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act (see appendix), answers to Senate Estimates questions on notice, released earlier this week, were evasive, stating *"The repeal of the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act (CRWMA) is under consideration by the Government."*

The CRWMA is an extraordinary piece of legislation which overrides NT laws prohibiting storage of Commonwealth waste and allows for a dump site to be established even in the absence of any consultation with, or consent from, Traditional Owners.

Affected communities, stakeholder organisations and the NT government have previously written to Minister Ferguson to query when the CRWMA repeal is scheduled to occur, but received no clear response, with correspondence to the Beyond Nuclear Initiative (Alice Springs) merely stating; *'The Australian Government is presently considering its approach to radioactive waste management in light of work already in progress and contractual commitments that were made by the previous government'*.

Beyond Nuclear Initiative spokesperson Natalie Wasley states "The federal government is dragging its feet on this very important issue. Howard left a toxic legacy of undemocratic and secretive dealing in relation to radioactive waste management- it is time for ALP to act on its commitment to "a responsible, mature and international best practice approach to radioactive waste management in Australia" (ALP platform and constitution chapter 5).

"Numerous statements by federal government Ministers and Senators have reiterated the repeal commitment, so these evasive Senate Estimate responses are clearly out of step with the government and ALP position", Ms Wasley continued.

Ms Wasley concluded "people across the country, who supported South Australian and Territory communities to oppose Howard's dump and run plans, are closely watching how ALP approach the important national issue of radioactive waste management".

"The Beyond Nuclear Initiative calls on Minister Martin Ferguson to immediately notify affected communities, stakeholder organisations and the broader public when the legislative repeal, as indicated in ALP policy, will occur. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd must ensure that Ferguson acts in accordance with ALP commitments on this issue".

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Appendix:

Chapter Five Australian Labor Party 44th National Conference

National Platform and Constitution 2007 pg 70

Nuclear Waste Facilities

Conference notes that for the past decade the Howard Government has tried to impose a controversial radioactive waste dump on various communities around Australia.

A rocket range in South Australia was one proposed site, before the High Court ruled SA out of the equation.

Then the Government tried to move the dump offshore.

Now they're trying to impose it on the Northern Territory, against the wishes of the NT Government and the community.

The Howard Government has ridden roughshod over the rights all Territorians—Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

The current Federal Radioactive Waste Dump plan is profoundly flawed. It is not a measured or responsible approach to the long-term management of Australia's radioactive waste.

It does not enjoy scientific, procedural or community credibility or license.

Labor is committed to a responsible, mature and international best practice approach to radioactive waste management in Australia.

Accordingly, a Federal Labor Government will:

- not proceed with the development of any of the current sites identified by the Howard Government in the Northern Territory, if no contracts have been entered into for those sites.
- repeal the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005.
- establish a process for identifying suitable sites that is scientific, transparent, accountable, fair and allows access to appeal mechanisms.
- identify a suitable site for a radioactive waste dump in accordance with the new process.
- ensure full community consultation in radioactive waste decision-making processes.
- commit to international best practice scientific processes to underpin Australia's radioactive waste management, including transportation and storage.