

DUMPING ON DEMOCRACY

The proposed federal radioactive waste dump in the Northern Territory

Sites currently under assessment:

1-Mt Everard- 40km NW of Alice Springs

"This land is not empty - people live right nearby. We hunt and collect bush tucker here and I am the custodian of a sacred site within the boundaries of the defence land. We don't want this poison here"
Steven McCormack-Traditional Owner living 4km from the proposed dump site

2- Harts Range-165km NE of Alice Springs

"Other pastoralists have also expressed concern over the perception by the public that the beef will be contaminated. The cattle industry out here prides itself on being clean and green". William Tilmouth, Chairman Alcoota Aboriginal Corporation (operating 20km away)

"If this nuclear waste is so safe, why can't they keep it at the Lucas Heights nuclear plant in Sydney, where it is produced and where the nuclear experts work? We stand strong in our own culture as Indigenous people, and want the land and water to be protected for all children, black and white. We have enough issues of our own to deal with without having to deal with the nuclear waste".
Mitch-Engawala community (20 km away)

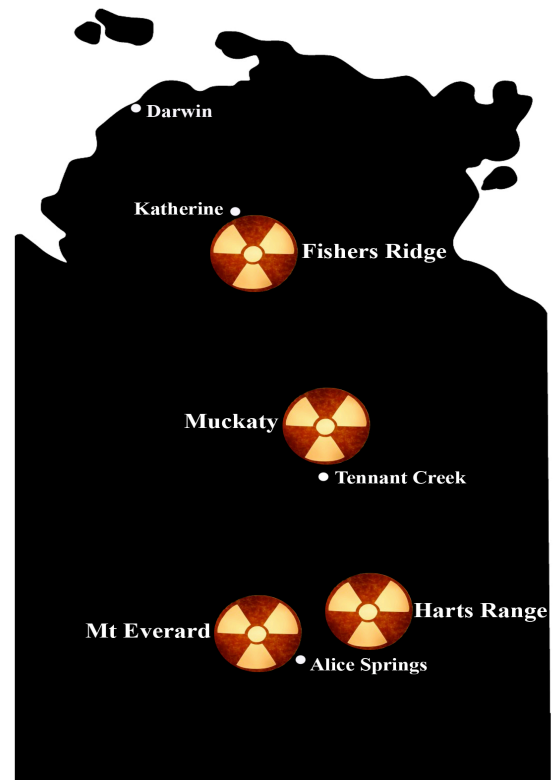
3-Fishers Ridge- 42km SE of Katherine

"Well it was shock horror, to think that everything was going along so swimmingly and then all of a sudden you're talking about a dump being in the middle of your property, we weren't very happy about it. We've been in the territory 36 years, and I think this is one of the roughest deals that have been dealt out to us". Barry Utlely- Yeltu Park Station Pastoralist living 4km from the site

4-Muckaty-120km north of Tennant Creek

"Top to bottom we got bush tucker right through the country. Whoever is taking this waste dump into our country needs to come back and talk to the Traditional Owners. We're not happy to have all of this stuff. We don't want it, it's not our spirit. Our spirit is our country, our country where our ancestors been born. Before towns, before hospitals, before cities. We want our country to be safe"
Dianne Stokes, Muckaty Traditional Owner

"We use that land for men's cultural ceremonies which came from our great grandfather. If they put a waste dump at Muckaty it betrays the next generation"
Sammy Sambo, Muckaty Traditional Owner



Proposed Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Facility in the NT

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Despite a 'categorical assurance' from Howard before the 2004 election that a radioactive dump would not be imposed on the Northern Territory, in July 2005 it was announced that three Department of Defence sites - Harts Range, Fisher's Ridge and Mt Everard- had been short-listed for assessment. There was no consultation with the NT Government or affected traditional owners and communities. None.

The draconian and undemocratic Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act (CRWMA) 2005 was then pushed through federal parliament, overriding NT laws prohibiting transport and storage of nuclear waste. A raft of environmental, public health and safety protections went out the window because of this legislation. In addition, the legislation prevents the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 from having effect during investigation of potential dump sites, and it excludes the Native Title Act 1993 from operating at all.

Amendments passed the following year to the CRWMA override Aboriginal Land Rights Act procedures requiring informed consent from all affected people and groups. In fact, these changes explicitly state that site nominations from Land Councils are valid even in the absence of consultation with traditional owners.

Under the amended process, Muckaty, 120 km north of Tennant Creek, was nominated by the Northern Land Council. The site was added to the short-list of potential sites in September 2007, when former Science Minister Julie Bishop accepted the contentious nomination. This clearly ignored strong, public opposition from a number of traditional owners from the Muckaty Land Trust for the 18 months from rumour to reality of the nomination.

The April 2008 conference of the NT ALP passed a motion that "*the nomination of Muckaty as a potential radioactive dump site, made under the CRWMA legislation, was not made with the full and informed consent of all Traditional Owners and affected people and as such does not comply with Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ALRA)*".

The conference called "*for the Muckaty nomination to also be repealed when the CRWMA legislation is overturned*".

Labor's national conference in April 2007 voted to repeal the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act (CRWMA) if elected. Labor also promised a method of addressing radioactive waste management issues which is "*scientific, transparent, accountable, fair and allows access to appeal mechanisms*" and to "*ensure full community consultation in radioactive waste decision-making processes*". (1)

A number of senior Labor Ministers and Senators released media statements prior to the 2007 federal election pledging repeal of the CRWMA if elected. ALP politicians had referred to the legislation as 'draconian', 'sordid', 'arrogant' and 'profoundly shameful' when it was rammed through by Howard.

After a decade of the Coalition Government's haphazard and bullying approach to radioactive waste management, there had been a cautious sigh of relief when Labor committed last year to a different approach. However, Minister Ferguson has continued to be every bit as secretive as his Coalition predecessors on this issue, recently calling for the dump process to be 'fast tracked' and continuing meetings with the Northern Land Council regarding the Muckaty site.

The Australian Greens put forward the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management (Repeal and Consequential Amendment) Bill 2008 in the Senate in late 2008, which triggered a Senate Inquiry. The Inquiry report recommended the dump laws were repealed in the first parliamentary sittings of 2009. This was not acted upon by the government, and communities are still waiting for Minister Martin Ferguson to indicate the government's intention for the NT dump plan.

Giving evidence at the Senate Hearing, Muckaty Traditional Owner Marlene Bennett said; *"I would just like to question why Martin Ferguson is sitting on this issue like a hen trying to hatch an egg. The people of the Northern Territory elected the Labor Party. We were led to believe that the nuclear waste thing would be all overturned and overruled, and at this moment we are extremely disappointed. How many times do we have to say no? No means no. Come on, Martin, let us do something about this"*.

The UK Committee on Radioactive Waste report released in June 2006 highlights how internationally; *"There is a growing recognition that it is not ethically acceptable for a society to impose a radioactive waste facility on an unwilling community"*.

We must continue to build national awareness of the Northern Territory radioactive waste dump campaign and build solidarity with the targeted communities fighting this proposal left decaying from the Howard era.

Howard's draconian dump laws must be repealed. There is no more time to waste.

(1) http://www.alp.org.au/platform/chapter_05.php

(2) "New push for nuclear waste dump" The Age, June 9, 2008

(3) <http://www.corwm.org.uk/pdf/Chapter14.pdf>, Chapter 14, point 12

Proposed Motions:

The _____ branch of the _____ Union:

1. Demands that the federal government immediately repeal the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act (CRWMA 2005/06) in accordance with clear pre-election commitments.
2. Demands that all four NT sites currently under assessment for the federal radioactive dump are repealed when the CRWMA legislation is overturned.
3. Calls on the federal government to initiate an independent and comprehensive public inquiry into radioactive waste management in Australia.
4. Stands in solidarity with targeted Traditional Owners and communities and in support of Trade Unions refusing to cooperate with implementation of this current policy.