



30 July 2003

**The Committee Manager
Joint Select Committee on the Transportation
and Storage of Nuclear Waste
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000**

Dear Sir

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the proposals by the Commonwealth Government to transport nuclear waste through, and potentially store nuclear waste within New South Wales.

The Edmund Rice Centre for Justice & Community Education recognises the significant implications these proposals could have for the citizens of NSW now and into the future.

Our comments on the proposals flow from serious concerns in three main areas:-

- Any proposal must take into consideration not only the needs and rights of citizens currently living in NSW, but also the needs and rights of future generations of Australians who have a right to live in a safe and healthy environment.
- That the needs and rights of the whole community must be considered. It is not acceptable for one section of the community to solve their problem by moving the cause of the problem elsewhere to the detriment of another part of our community.
- There is an increasing consensus in our society that the solution to the problem of “waste” in society generally lies in minimising waste at its source rather than “treating” the ever increasing mountains of waste that modern society produces.

RIGHTS OF CITIZENS, NOW AND FUTURE

The low and short lived intermediate level nuclear waste which is proposed to be transported and stored near Woomera, will pose possible dangers to people living along the transport corridors, and will remain dangerous and a threat to human health and the environment for up to 300 years.

Experience confirms that despite all precautions accidents do occur. It would be impossible to ensure that appropriately trained personnel would be available along the whole length of the transport corridor to react immediately to an accident, thus putting at risk citizens living along the route.

As a society with only 50 years of experience in dealing with nuclear 'waste' we are making decisions which will affect many future generations of Australians. There is much uncertainty and disagreement among 'experts' regarding the best way to store nuclear waste. No government can guarantee the safety of any dumpsite for periods of hundreds or thousands of years. Commitment to a proposal that involves transport over long distances to achieve a questionable "solution" to a problem that could have serious consequences for future generations is morally questionable on many grounds, not least that of justice to our children.

COMMUNITY RIGHTS

Polls show the citizens of South Australia and their elected Government are strongly opposed to nuclear waste being dumped in their state. In NSW, many local government areas through which the waste would be transported, have declared themselves as nuclear free zones. The Federal Government seems determined to ignore the concerns of these communities.

If we have to have a nuclear reactor, a position with which we would strongly disagree, and the NSW Government agrees to the location of the reactor at Lucas Heights, it seems that the NSW Government should agree to the storage of the waste on site, above ground, close to expert supervision where the condition of the waste can regularly and expertly monitored as the technology for its containment develops over time. Transporting the waste (75% of which would come from the reactor) seems a short-sighted answer to the problem, merely moving the problem from one community (with some expertise in its maintenance) to another remote community and in the process endangering other small communities along the way.

WASTE MINIMISATION

As the size and complexity of the "waste problem" in our society increases, there is an increasing consensus that the solution lies in reducing the size of the waste problem rather than allowing the "problem" to increase and **then** seeking a treatment. As a society we are moving from an emphasis on "recycling waste" to "reducing waste".

The vast majority of the waste in terms of radioactivity would come from the Lucas Heights reactor site. Rather than imposing radioactive waste dumps on unwilling communities, the Federal Government should be supporting non-nuclear alternatives and actively reducing the amount of waste produced in Australia.

As in so many other areas, the best form of waste management is to support the reduction of waste at its source.

CONCLUSION

As an organisation concerned with issues of justice and human rights within our society, we strongly urge that in its deliberations, the Committee consider carefully the rights and expressed concerns of all the communities that may currently be affected by the Federal Government's proposals. We also remind the Committee that the current proposals have the potential to affect many future generations of Australian citizens, and that decision makers of this generation have a serious responsibility to our children, for the decisions they make will surely affect the lives of many future Australians.

We wish the Committee well in their deliberations on this significant issue for the future of our country.

Yours faithfully



P S Cram
Edmund Rice Centre for Justice & Community Education

