



THE HON DANNA VALE MP
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR HUGHES

23 July 2003

Mr Ian Thackeray, Committee Manager
Joint Select Committee on the Transportation
& Storage of Nuclear Waste
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Thackeray

I refer to your letter of the 11 July 2003 advising of a Joint Select Committee and it's enquiry into the proposals by the Commonwealth government to transport and potentially store nuclear waste in New South Wales. I wish to lodge the following points to assist the enquiry.

National facilities

1. Almost half of Australia's radioactive waste is stored at more than 50 different locations around Australia, typically at hospitals and universities in our capital cities, but also in regional areas.
2. Currently, waste producers are responsible for looking after this waste themselves. Although this waste has been stored under supervision and in accordance with the acts and regulations applied by the Commonwealth and State governments, these circumstances are not ideal.
3. Given the small amounts of radioactive waste generated in Australia, it is neither efficient nor effective for each jurisdiction to establish its own disposal facilities. The establishment of purpose-built facilities for the storage and disposal of radioactive waste is the safest and most effective option for the Australian community to manage its radioactive waste.
4. Construction and operation of the proposed national waste facilities will be subject to regulation by the Australian Nuclear Safety and Radiation Protection Agency (ARPANSA).

Transport of radioactive material

5. Radioactive materials are transported in Australia every day, primarily by road and by air. As well as radioisotopes for medical centres or industry, this includes consumer products containing small quantities of radioactive materials (e.g. smoke detectors), which are transported in large numbers to retail outlets.
6. On average, ANSTO Radiopharmaceuticals and Industrials sends about 2,500 packages per month of radioisotopes for medical and industrial uses to destinations around Australia and overseas. There has been no transport incident from the movement of these materials that has resulted in a release of radioactivity that has had adverse effects on the environment or people.
7. The transport of these materials is in accordance with strict, internationally accepted guidelines and the *Australian Code of Practice for the Transportation of Radioactive Materials 2001*, which is itself based on international standards.

8. Worldwide, over several decades of transporting radioactive material, there has not been an in-transit accident with serious human health, economic or environmental consequences attributable to the radioactive nature of the transported goods.

Waste quantities and packaging

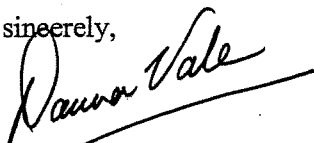
9. Australia has accumulated around 3700 cubic metres of low-level (LLW) and short-lived, intermediate-level waste (SLILW) from research, medical and industrial use of radioactive materials during the period from the end of the 19th century until the present day.
10. More than half of the accumulated waste is drummed, contaminated soil from Fishermans Bend, Victoria which is now in storage at Woomera. This material was transported there safely in 1994-95, without any impacts.
11. Australia's total holdings of LLW and SLILW are a small fraction of the annual arisings (about 25,000 cubic metres) in countries such as Britain or France. The transport of waste to repositories in those countries has not caused any significant exposures to people or the environment.
12. The waste to be transported from Lucas Heights to the Repository will consist of inert solids within multiple levels of containment. This will include encasement in concrete, placement in steel drums, and packing securely inside 6 metre long steel shipping containers. There will be no liquid waste involved and therefore no possibility of spillage into waterways along the transport route during transport. Containers are designed to remain intact in the event of an accident. Even if an accident occurred, there would be no significant radiological consequences. The major effect would arise primarily from the physical impact.

As a new Member of Parliament in 1996, two of the first priorities our local Council raised with me was the urgent need for a national waste repository for radioactive waste and for an independent regulator for the nuclear activity within Australia. It is a source of personal satisfaction to me that these two challenges are delivered. On the 14 May 1998, the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency Bill (ARPANSA) was passed after much work with the then Minister for Health, the Hon Dr Wooldridge; and the site for a national low level waste repository has been selected in South Australia only recently.

As you would be aware, there are many varied sources of radioactive waste in Australia; and many Australians benefit greatly by the appropriate application of things nuclear. It is also appropriate, and indeed, desirable, that we as a nation take responsible measures to secure and store such waste.

I do hope that the information provided above is of assistance to the Joint Select Committee and look forward to your report.

Yours sincerely,



DANNA VALE MP
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR HUGHES