

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

This submission has been compiled by the Irati Wanti campaign office, on behalf of the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta. The Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta are a council of senior Aboriginal women from Yankunytjatjara, Antikarinya and Kokatha Country. They have been fighting to stop the proposed radioactive waste dump in South Australia for the last five years. Their campaign is called 'Irati Wanti', the poison, leave it.

As the following statements attest, the storage and transport of radioactive waste is a major concern of the Kungka Tjuta.

Opposition to the waste dump

In 1999, the Kungka Tjuta issued an overarching Statement of Opposition to the proposed radioactive waste dump outlining their concerns.

We are the Aboriginal women - Yankunytjatjara, Antikarinya and Kokatha. We know the Country. We were born on the earth, not in the hospital. We were born in the sand...we really know the land. From a baby we grow up on the land.

Never mind our country is desert, that's where we belong. And we love where we belong, the whole land. We know the stories for the land. The Seven Sisters travelled right across in the beginning. They formed the land. It's very important Tjukur, the Law, the Dreaming. The Seven Sisters are everywhere...

All of us were living when the Government used the country for [British atomic tests in the 1950s-1960s]. The smoke was funny and everything looked hazy. Everybody got sick. Whitefellas and all got sick. When we were young cancer was unheard of. We were people without sickness.

The Government thought they knew what they were doing then. Now, again they are coming along and telling us poor blackfellas "Oh, there's nothing that's going to happen, nothing is going to kill you". And that will still happen like that Bomb over there.

And we're worrying for our kids. We've got a lot of kids growing up on the country and still coming more, grandchildren and great grandchildren. They have to have their life.

Storage of waste

In a 2002 letter of support to South Australian premier Mike Rann, the Kungka Tjuta reiterated their opposition to shallow burial of radioactive waste, and advocated for above ground storage at the site of production.

Keep it in your own place, in your own community. Why they bring it here? Why? This manta (earth) isn't like Sydney, no Irati- poison. We have saltwater, dig it out, and drink the water.

The desert lands are not as dry as you think. Can't the Government plainly see there is water here? Nothing can live without water. There is a big underground river underneath. We know the poison from the radioactive dump will go underground and leak into the water. We drink from this water. The animals drink from this water. We eat these animals, that's our meat. We are worried that these animals will be poisoned and we will become poisoned in turn...

We don't want the poison to come back this way – Arcoona Station. We're still talking strongly about water, we've got spring water – that's all the water we've got underground.

Risks associated with transport of radioactive waste

In April 2003, two members of the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta, Mrs Eileen Kampakuta Brown and Mrs Eileen Wani Wingfield, were awarded the prestigious international Goldman Environmental Prize. Mrs Wingfield attended a prize ceremony in San Francisco, and Mrs Brown and other members of the Kungka Tjuta travelled to Sydney to collect the prize.

In a letter to Federal Environment Minister David Kemp following the approval of the Environmental Impact Statement, the Kungka Tjuta explained their concerns with regards to the transport of hazardous waste.

They've got to keep it, the poison, in Sydney. We never told them to bring it here when they were finished with it

We've just come back from a big trip to Sydney because two of our Ladies won the big Goldman Prize for all the work we have been doing to stop the dump and save our culture. We went in the car across the highway, the same one those trucks carrying the irati, the poison would come. We know that road now and it's too dangerous with all those people in Broken Hill, Dubbo and the Blue Mountains.

Motivated by their concern for communities along the transport route, members of the Kungka Tjuta attended to a 'No more radioactive genocide' gathering outside of Broken Hill in July 2003.

If the truck has an accident, it will kill everything. The kids on the road, the animals everything... Leave the waste in Sydney, keep it.

The Kungka Tjuta urge the Committee to listen to us. Please. We have been saying please for a long time. We're frightened for the little ones.

Eileen Kampakuta Brown

Ivy Makinti Stewart

Emily Munyungka Austin

Eileen Unkari Crombie

Tjunmutja Myra Watson

Dianne Edwards

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Emily Austin
Eileen Crombie
Watson
D Edwards

on behalf of the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta

www.iratiwanti.org

The following letter from the Honourable Dr David Kemp, Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, is in response to a letter from the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta in May after they heard of his final approval of Site 40a to house Australia's first nuclear waste dump.

This is the first time a Liberal Cabinet Minister has responded to the Senior Women in the past 5 years of campaigning. Please note he put talking marks on "poisoning".

Dear Mrs Brown, Mrs Austin, Mrs Wonga and Mrs Watson,

Thank you for your letter of 7 May 2003, about the proposed national low-level radioactive waste repository.

I fully understand your concerns about the possible "poisoning" of lands near the repository site, particularly when taken in the context of the British atomic tests at Maralinga and Emu. However, I can assure you that the low-level waste repository is in no way comparable to the atomic tests, and that the facility will be well managed and controlled.

I can assure you that the government has listened to your concerns about the proposed repository and concerns expressed by the members of the regional Consultative Committee that was established to facilitate the exchange of information between the Commonwealth and regional stakeholders. This committee included representatives from the Andamooka Land Council Association, Antikarinja Land Management Corporation, Barngala Native Title Claimants, Kokatha Native Title Claimants and Kujani Native Title Claimants. Furthermore, as outlined in the Environmental Impact Statement, potential sites for the repository and access routes, including Site 40a, the site for the repository, and its access route, were cleared for Aboriginal heritage values by the relevant native title claimant groups and other Aboriginal groups with heritage interests in the area. Clearance inspections were conducted from 1998 to 2000 and many possible sites were removed from consideration or relocated during the process to meet the concerns of the traditional owners.

Regarding your concerns about high-level wastes from the Lucas Heights reactor in Sydney, I can assure you that only low level waste such as from material used in hospitals will be stored in the new repository, not waste from Lucas Heights.

The technology for near surface repositories is well proven as being safe for handling low-level and short-lived intermediate radioactive waste material. The operation of the repository will be safe and its long-term integrity assured as the facility will be operated according to general environmental conditions established by me, and licence conditions established by the Commonwealth's independent regulator for radiation-related matters, the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency.

I can assure you that the government will not forget about the repository and there will be no poisoning of groundwater from operation of the repository.

I have copied your letter and my reply to the Minister for Science.

Yours sincerely

DAVID KEMP

Minister for the Environment and Heritage

Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Tel: 02 6277 7640 Fax: 02 6273 6101 www.ea.gov.au

This is the original letter to Minister Kemp from the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta.

7th May 2003

To Minister David Kemp,

We are the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta - the Senior Aboriginal Women of Coober Pedy. We heard you are making up your mind about the dump. We have written many letters over the years talking over and over about this nuclear dump business and you still don't listen.

We have just come back from a big trip to Sydney because two of our Ladies won the big Goldman Prize for all the work we have been doing to stop the dump and save our culture. We went in the car across the highway, the same one those trucks carrying the irati - the poison would come. We know that road now and it's too dangerous with all those people in Broken Hill, Dubbo and the Blue Mountains.

You have been playing around with that poison for a long time in Sydney at Lucas Heights. You have to keep that rubbish there where you make it. You can keep an eye on it there, but here you would just forget about it and it will poison the water.

We are the Culture Women and we are worried about the tjitji tjabu - all the little kids still coming up after us. But we are worried about everyone's kids, not just our own. The beautiful desert is our home.

We know the stories for the land. We know that the poison will go down underground and leak into the water. We say NO radioactive waste in our ngura - in our country.

Mrs. Eileen Kampakuta Brown
Mrs. Emily Munyungka Austin
Mrs. Angelina Wonga
Mrs. Myra Kumantjara Watson
For the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta
Coober Pedy, South Australia

For further information contact: Irati Wanti Campaign Office 08 8672 3413
kungkatjuta@iratiwanti.org www.iratiwanti.org

Irati,Wanti!! means The Poison - Leave It!!
in Yankunytjatjara language, Aboriginal language of the Western Desert, Central Australia.