

Submission No 233

BANC Inc

Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre Inc

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

30 July 2003

Re: Transport and Storage of Nuclear Waste -
Submission - Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre

We are situate in the Blue Mountains City Council Area which is an area of 1432 sq. Kms and a resident population of more than 76541. The area extends from Glenbrook to the other side of Mount Victoria - It's major and only direct access is the Great Western Highway which passes through Springwood, Faulconbridge, Woodford, Hazelbrook, Lawson Wentworth Falls, Leura, Katoomba, Medlow Bath and Blackheath. The area is a World Heritage Area. The towns along the route, particularly Katoomba with the Three Sisters and Medlow Bath with its famous Hydro Majestic are tourist meccas. Sunday afternoon traffic with tourists returning from outlying areas such as Bathurst, Orange and Mudgee (plus many other towns) is held up in normal circumstances and with any accident is chaotic. Nighttime truck movement are many and on ordinary weekdays traffic is heavy.

Attached are weather patterns for August 2002 - (Marked A)

As the weather patterns indicate the roads are frost covered in many areas in winter, there are areas of black ice which are a particular hazard and the mist is often so thick it is difficult for drivers to find their way.

The road has a sorry history of serious accidents and the passage of heavy trucks travelling this main arterial road is enormous. As stated above this road passes through urban areas, past many schools, hospitals, rural land and a World Heritage Area into the bargain. Enquiries of the Fire Brigade and other services indicate they have not the equipment or expertise to deal with a nuclear spill. There

does not seem to be any known plan for an emergency in order to deal with same.

We oppose the proliferation of nuclear waste, we lose our credibility as a nation by imposing this on the people of South Australia (polls show 80% of South Australians do not support the waste dump). We oppose it's production in the manner described, at its source and we oppose the path it will take to indigenous Australians' home. Australia's image in the world's eye is being scrutinised carefully by many individuals and many other nations. It is important our government respects the rights and safety of all. Our treatment of minority groups as a nation is being seriously examined and questioned. It is important we have credibility as a nation. The actions of the Federal Government on this issue is wanting. BANC strongly supports the position of the people of the land proposed for the dump - the Anangu - Irati Wanti, Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta - the senior Aboriginal women who have fought so hard for their cause. (attached and marked B is information relating to their concerns). What white people see as wasteland is home, valuable food and water sources for the people who live there.

THERE IS NO KNOWN SAFE LONG TERM METHOD OF NUCLEAR WASTE STORAGE. THERE IS NO 100% SAFE METHOD OF TRANSPORTING NUCLEAR WASTE. IT IS IRRESPONSIBLE IN THE EXTREME TO EXPOSE A WORLD HERITAGE LISTED NATIONAL PARK TO THE POSSIBILITY OF NUCLEAR CONTAMINATION.



Barbara Armitage O.A.M.
on behalf of the Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre

"A"

August 2002 Winter Records for Blackheath

These observations are recorded at my home site and will be added as I have time. Use them as a guide only.

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Frid	Sat
Week 1 Date					1/8/02	2/8/02	3/8/02
Min/Max					2.5 / 14	6 / 13	6 / 15
R.Humidity					8am: 80%	1pm: 45%	4pm: 60%
Precipitation					1mm		3mm
Wind Speed					light w.	mod. w.	strong sw
Observations					am: frost pm: sunny	am: thunder pm: 4/8	am: sunny pm: gales
Week 2 Date	4/8/02	5/8/02	6/8/02	7/8/02	8/8/02	9/8/02	10/8/02
Min/Max	0 / 9.5	0 / 14	5 / 12.5	3.5 / 10	1 / 13.5	2 / 16.5	5.5 / 15.5
R.Humidity	1pm: 65%	1pm: 50%	10am: 50%	2pm: 60%	1pm: 40%	1pm: 40%	1pm: 35%
Precipitation							
Wind Speed	fresh w.	light w.	fresh w.	fresh sw	light w.	light w.	fresh nw.
Observations	am: frost pm: sunny	am: frost pm: sunny	am: 5/8 pm: sunny	am: 2/8 pm: 7/8	am: frost pm: sunny	am: sunny pm: sunny	am: sunny pm: sunny
Week 3 Date	11/8/02	12/8/02	13/8/02	14/8/02	15/8/02	16/8/02	17/8/02
Min/Max	9 / 16.5	9 / 9	0 / 4	-2.5 / 7.5	-1.5 / 8	0 / 10.5	0 / 9
R.Humidity	4pm: 28%	8pm: 80%	1pm: 60%	1pm: 50%	3pm: 40%	1pm: 55%	1pm: 60%
Precipitation		2mm	trace				2mm
Wind Speed	strong nw.	strong w.	fresh sw.	calm	light se.	calm	light se.
Observations	am: windy pm: sunny	am: sleet, hail 11am pm: 8pm, 2cm snow cover. Note: 1.5C, snow midday, 0C at 8pm	am: light snow pm: 4/8	am: heavy frost pm: 4/8	am: heavy frost pm: sunny	am: frost pm: sunny	am: heavy frost pm: 5/8
Week 4 Date	18/8/02	19/8/02	20/8/02	21/8/02	22/8/02	23/8/02	24/8/02
Min/Max	3 / 8	1.5 / 12.5	2.5 / 13	3 / 13	5.5 / 12.5	1.5 / 9.5	-2.5 / 9
R.Humidity	11am: 85%	3pm: 45%	1pm: 40%	1pm: 35%	10am: 65%	11am: 80%	2pm: 35%
Precipitation	0.5mm				1.5mm		
Wind Speed	light se.	calm	mod. w	light w.	light w.	light s.	light s.
Observations	am: 6/8 pm: 8/8	am: sunny pm: 5/8	am: frost pm: sunny	am: sunny pm: 7/8	am: 7/8 pm: hail	am: 7/8 pm: 8/8	am: frost pm: sunny
Week 5 Date	25/8/02	26/8/02	27/8/02	28/8/02	29/8/02	30/8/02	31/8/02

Min/Max	0 / 6.5	1.5 / 8.5	1.5 / 8.5	1.5 / 10.5	5 / 12	5 / 14.5	2.5 / 15
R.Humidity	9am: 75%	9am: 87%	12pm: 70%	11am: 60%	1pm: 50%	9am: 70%	1pm: 50%
Precipitation	0.5mm	trace	trace		4mm		
Wind Speed	light s.e	light s.e	light s.e	light n.w	mod. w	mod. w	mod.w
Observations	am: 6/8 pm: 8/8	am: mist pm: 8/8	am: 6/8 pm: 8/8	am: sunny pm: 5/8	am: 5/8 pm: thunder	am: sunny pm: sunny	am: sunny pm: 8/8

irati wanti

"B"

radioactive waste dump

BACKGROUND BRIEF

The nuclear industry in Australia is gearing to undergo a massive expansion. The Federal Government is now proposing a national radioactive waste dump in the central desert homelands of South Australia. The dump will open the door to high level waste and threaten country and culture for thousands of years.

**We say "NO RADIOACTIVE WASTE IN OUR NGURA IN OUR COUNTRY"
"It's strictly poison and we don't want it."**

The waste dump will seed the industry's expansion by allowing continued and increased production of nuclear waste and is an 'out of sight, out of mind' response to the waste problem.

Polling in SA shows 87% of people oppose the low level dump and 95% oppose the Store for the reactor's long lived wastes (*The Advertiser, July 2000*).

On this page learn about:

- [Shallow Burial waste disposal](#)
 - [Water contamination](#)
 - [Transport risks](#)
 - [Alternatives to nuclear fission and shallow burial](#)
 - [Who is behind the dump proposal?](#)
- see also [Declaration](#)

SHALLOW BURIAL

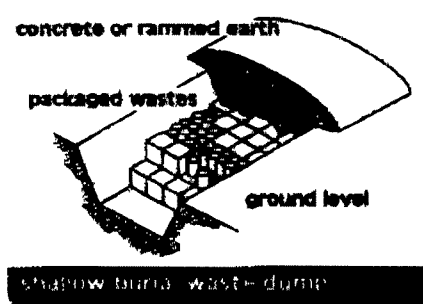
"The poison the Government is talking about is from Sydney. We say send it back to Sydney. We don't want it! Are they trying to kill us? We're a human being. We're not an animal. We're not a dog. In the old days the white man used to put a poison in the meat, throw them to feed the dogs and they got poisoned, straight out and then they died. Now they want to put the poison in the ground. We want our life." Eileen Unkarl Crombie

Design for the radioactive waste dump

The proposed dump will be about the size of a soccer field. The waste will be placed in trenches 20 metres deep, probably inside steel drums. The drums will then be covered with concrete or rammed earth. The exact plans for the dump's design have never been made public and will not be fully disclosed until a site has been selected.

Shallow burial - ignoring their own experts

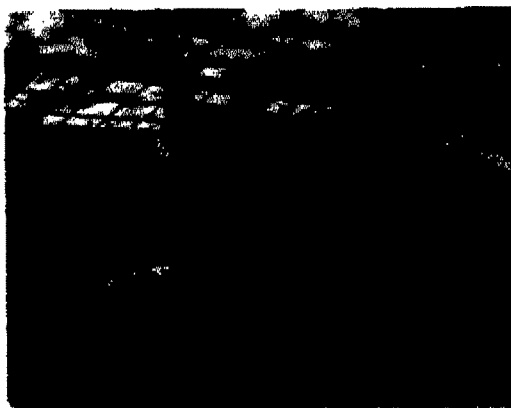
In 1995 the Senate Select Committee on the Dangers of Radioactive Waste conducted an inquiry into the production of radioactive materials and waste management. They strongly recommended against 'shallow burial' and for the construction of a national above ground facility as a central store for radioactive waste. They also recommended the facility be "adequately engineered to withstand all possible climatic conditions, no matter how unlikely". Yet, the Bureau of Science admits that the **proposed design will not prevent leakage of water, nor human, animal or plant intrusion.**



Short term responsibility - long lived poison

The dump will only have an 'institutional control period' of 100 years. This means the dump's operator is only responsible under law for 100 years. It is also claimed that the dump will only have an 'engineering integrity' of 300 years. However, some wastes they intend to dump have half lives extending far beyond these minimal amounts of time. For example, the **half life of Radium 226, typically found amongst low-level waste, is 1600 years.** Radium gives rise to Radon gas and its decay products are the main agents of lung cancer in uranium miners.

The fact that Radium decays into a toxic gas would require the dump to isolate radioactive vapors from the environment. Shallow Burial does not prevent gases leaking into the environment. Other likely wastes such as Americium 241 have a half-life of 432 years and decays into Neptunium 237, which have a half life of over 2 million years. Again, this far exceeds the control periods.



Kapi-wiya [the water will be affected]

Listen to us. The desert lands are not as dry as you think! Can't the Government plainly see that there is water here? Nothing can live without water. There's a big underground river here. We know the poison from the radioactive waste dump will go under the ground and leak into the water. Eileen Wani Wingfield.

Despite the virtual absence of surface water, there are large reserves of groundwater in the SA desert region in the Great Artesian Basin [GAB]. This water resource is critical for all human activity, as well as for the unique mound springs and most life in the area.

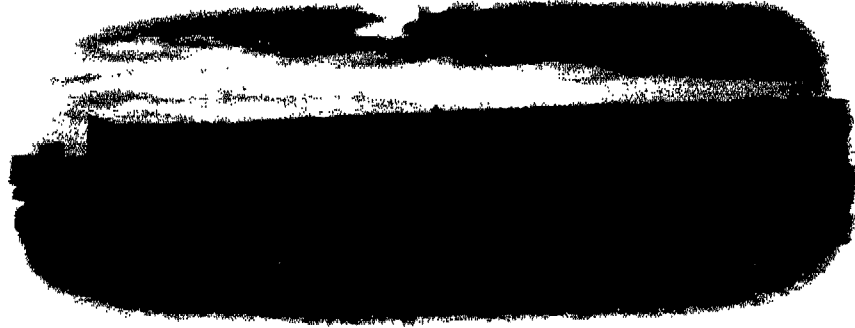
When the desert experiences an extreme climate event such as a flood, it is thought that these waters seep underground and renew ground water. This water may leach through a shallow burial nuclear waste dump and poison the water supply for thousands of years. If radionuclides leak from this proposed waste dump, it may lead to huge tracts of groundwater being permanently contaminated. This directly threatens the life in the desert that all rely on this precious water source for their existence and survival.

"The animals drink from this water, *malu* kangaroo, *kalays* emu, porcupine, *ngintaka* perentie, goanna and all the other. We eat these animals, that's our meat. We're worried that any of these animals will become poisoned and we'll become poisoned in our turn." Ivy Makinti Stewart and Eileen Kampukuta Brown

TRANSPORTATION RISKS

"Everytime we're talking, our words bounce back. Over and over we're saying the same thing. Don't let them bring the poison from where they are treating it in Sydney. Put it back in Sydney. Its too dangerous, the trucks bringing it all the way here." Emily Munyungka Austin, KPKT

Siting the waste dump in outback South Australia far from the site of production and use, creates the tyranny of distance to an already complex waste management problem. Radioactive wastes will be transported across the continent. First through suburban Sydney then through communities such as Broken Hill and Port Augusta. This adds the dangerous risk of accident and contamination of communities and the environment en-route during transportation. There have been hundreds of reported transport related accidents worldwide and many go unreported. Communities across Australia on the proposed transport route are outraged and have declared their shires nuclear free zones.



Out of sight, out of mind

Many other problems arise from remote burial. It will be difficult to manage the site. Most nuclear 'experts' are based in the cities. This will seriously compromise security and monitoring of the waste dump and radioactivity levels. Shallow burial contributes to the 'out of sight, out of mind' culture of the nuclear industry and makes it very difficult to retrieve when leakages occur. The proposed waste dump is a public health hazard with long term and unpredictable environmental and social impacts.

there is an alternative ABOVE GROUND DRY STORAGE

"We're here to look after the country. We're not going to live forever. If we do the right thing to help the younger generation, they'll turn around and fight for the protection of their country in their turn. And many tourists come from all over to our country to see the scenery and enjoy the sunshine, no poison, nothing. We don't want nothing: no radioactive waste dump buried in Australia."
Emily Munyungka Austin

It's impossible to dispose radioactive waste: it never goes away. The preferred strategy to store radioactive waste is in an above ground facility that can withstand all possible climatic conditions, at or near the site of production or use.

Advantages of this strategy are:

- 1. The waste will be dry.** If it is buried it will eventually contaminate groundwater, typically relied upon in arid regions for survival of all life.
- 2. The waste is accessible.** If it is buried leaked wastes and contaminated soils and water will be difficult to retrieve. Above ground storage will allow for access and regular monitoring. It will be possible to repackage the waste and place it in a new storage facility.
- 3. Reduced risk of transport accidents and contamination.** Remote burial means transportation

across the continent and will put communities en route at risk of radioactive contamination or accidental exposure.

4. Encouraging waste minimalisation. Remote burial fosters the 'out of sight, out of mind' disposal culture amongst producers. On site would encourage best practice waste minimalisation strategies.

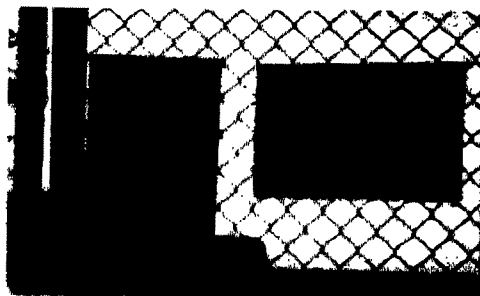
5. It will be close to the experts. Remote burial makes it difficult for experts to monitor the site. To keep the waste safely isolated from the environment and the community, it is necessary for expert monitoring to be in effect for the duration of its toxicity.

6. It can be guarded for many generations. If the waste is accessible, secure and close to experts it can be guarded over the period of time it remains poisonous. It is necessary to create a guardianship culture that extends to future generations making sure the waste is properly managed. The only way to do this is by above ground dry storage at or near the site of production and use.

Cleaner... cheaper... safer.... Alternatives to nuclear fission

ANSTO claim they need the reactor to produce isotopes for medical and research use. But alternative isotope production technologies, such as cyclotrons and spallation sources are safer than reactors, produce far less radioactive waste and cannot be used for weapons production [e.g., in India and Israel]. Also it is possible to import some isotopes while alternative technologies are further developed.

99.7% of all nuclear medicine procedures in Australia use isotopes which can be produced by alternative technologies and/or imported. For the remaining 0.03% there are many alternative clinical technologies, such as magnetic resonance imaging, computerised tomography and many others.



Who is behind the dump?

Who is behind the dump proposal?

The Department of Industry, Science and Resources [DISR] along with the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation [ANSTO] are the main Commonwealth departments promoting the radioactive waste dump.

ANSTO and their plans for a new reactor

ANSTO operates the research nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights in southwestern Sydney. The Reactor produces 85% of Australia's nuclear waste [excluding uranium tailings]. These include over 1400 highly radioactive spent fuel rods. Most of this waste is being stored on site. ANSTO is planning to decommission the old reactor as the Government has recently approved the construction of a new reactor costing more than 500 million dollars. This is the largest scientific grant in Australia's history. To gain public and political approval to build the new reactor ANSTO needs to clear the site of radioactive waste.

They intend to transport lower level wastes to the shallow burial dump in central South Australia, and send the high level spent fuel rods across the oceans to France or Argentina for reprocessing. Reprocessed nuclear waste, still at a dangerously high level of radioactivity, will be later returned to Australia to be stored at an above ground storage facility. It could possibly be co-located on site of the shallow burial dump.

Commonwealth undermines community opposition and state powers

In a serious threat to democracy the Commonwealth intends to compulsorily acquire the chosen site using the powers under the *Land Acquisition Act*. This acquisition would cancel out native title interests over the area, and undermine the opposition to the dump by the indigenous custodians of the land, SA Parliament and local communities. The Federal Government's disregard for community opposition was further demonstrated by Senator Minchin's reply in May 2000 that: "Any legislation passed by the SA or other State or Territory Governments will not change our plans."

Related Links:

[SA says: Stop Nuclear Dumps](#) : A site by South Australians against the proposed dump with facts, history and contact information.

[Jim Green - Nuclear and Environmental Research](#) : A comprehensive background on the nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights and waste dump.

References:

Bureau of Research Sciences, [A Radioactive Waste Repository for Australia: Site Selection Study Phase 3 Regional Assessment: A Discussion Paper, February 1998](#)

Mudd, G. [Radioactive Waste Repositories: Environmental Review of the Permanent Threats to Groundwater Resources in Arid Regions, 2000 \[unpublished\]](#)

Noonan D. [Background to the Proposed National Radioactive Waste Dump, 2000 \[unpublished\]](#)

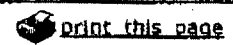
Senate Select Committee on the Dangers of Radioactive Waste, [No Time to Waste](#), April 1996

[The Facts about a National Radioactive Waste Dump: A Briefing Paper](#)
FoE, Australia. Oct, 1999

[Transportation of Radioactive Wastes: A Briefing Paper](#)
FoE, Australia. Oct, 1999

Voronoff, D. ["No Radioactive dump in our country."](#) FoE [Fitzroy] Newsletter, Summer 1999.

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The Committee Manager,
Joint Select Committee on the Transportation and Storage of Nuclear Waste,
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Sydney 2000.

29 July 2003.

To the Committee Manager:

This submission is from the Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre. The Centre provides services to the communities at the top of the Blue Mountains which include Blackheath, Megalong Valley, Mount Victoria and the Mounts. Two of these communities, Blackheath and Mount Victoria lie along the Great Western Highway and frequently experience major traffic delays and demands on their communities from accidents and incidences that occur on the highway.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and it is our hope that the concerns we raise are seriously considered by the Joint Select Committee and acted upon. On behalf of the people of the communities at the top of the Blue Mountains and in their interests we make the following comments:

We urge the **NSW Government to enact legislation** and/or undertake necessary actions to STOP the Federal Government building a new reactor at Lucas Heights, the transporting nuclear waste through NSW towns and cities on local roads and highways and the building of a waste dump for any level of waste (low, medium, high) in NSW and to act as good Australian citizens and act to prevent storage occurring anywhere in Australia..

We urge the **NSW government to lead the way in medical isotope production** by: purchasing from the glut on the world market, mainly from Canada; proposing that safer and less costly forms of isotopes can be made from non-nuclear sources – NSW could become a LEADER in this production.

In particular, we are concerned that it is possible that **nuclear waste could be transported through 27 towns in the Blue Mountains** - a local road and major highway west - a **World Heritage Area** with many special fauna and flora species; a *cold climate and intrepid highway (despite the upgrades) where the potential for accidents is high and the potential for accidents increases with *speed (*Federal Government EIS 2003 Chapter 7), which passes through residential areas close to homes, schools and businesses; and which is a major tourist area.

We believe this is a complex issue with **long term implications for community safety**. The community has a right to be fully and truthfully informed about current and future plans, to be given the opportunity to oppose any plans and to be properly consulted and listened to.

We believe that there should be “**cradle to grave**” attitudes and actions regarding nuclear production ie from mining it, to manufacturing and to waste – storage, transportation and waste disposal. The actions and decisions we undertake now have impacts on current peoples and future generations. **THERE IS NO WAY ANY GOVERNMENT OR COMPANY CAN ENSURE SAFETY FROM NUCLEAR ACCIDENT AND FROM NUCLEAR CONTAMINATION. PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO LIVE SAFELY AND A RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT SAFELY IN THE INTERESTS OF COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT.** There is no insurance payable on nuclear accidents and damage.

Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) first became a **Nuclear Free Zone** in 1982. It has in the recent past reaffirmed its opposition to the transportation of Nuclear Waste through the Blue Mountains. There is no legal requirement to inform BMCC if waste will be transported and this goes against formal policy and community concerns.

We do not believe that there are ADEQUATE plans in place should a transport accident occur in the Mountains. THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE. A plan needs to have the knowledge and support of services in the Blue Mountains and people must be willing and able to implement it.

The Indigenous Australians owners of the land (Kupa Piti Kunga Tjuta) have campaigned against a nuclear waste dump being built on their lands. Two members recently won International Goldman Environmental Awards for their efforts. **WE, AS GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC NEED TO LISTEN AND ACT ON THEIR WISDOM AND GRAVE CONCERNS**

BLUE MOUNTAINS RESIDENTS WERE NOT GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK AT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS FOR THE RECENT EIS (as were residents of Dubbo, Broken Hill, Mildura and Port Augusta)

The Community Interagency requests that a hearing take place in the Blue Mountains where residents can voice their concerns.

Again, we reiterate our grave concerns as contained in this submission and urge the NSW Government to stand up for the people and environment of NSW by saying

NO TO A NEW REACTOR

NO TO TRANSPORTAION THROUGH NSW TOWNS

NO TO A WASTE DUMP FOR NUCLEAR WASTE IN NSW or Australia without geater public input.

Yours Sincerely,



Leonie Cameron
