

INQUIRY INTO URANIUM MINING AND NUCLEAR FACILITIES (PROHIBITIONS) REPEAL BILL 2019

Organisation: Nelson Parade Action Group

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Nelson Parade Action Group (NPAG) Submission to Nuclear Energy Inquiry 14 September 2019

This submission is on behalf of the Nelson Parade Action Group (NPAG) whose members have been working for 11 years towards appropriate remediation of the radioactive contamination in the residential street of Nelson Parade Hunters Hill, NSW. This submission is based on our experience with radioactive waste management in NSW and addresses two concerns fundamental to the Nuclear Energy Inquiry: waste management and safety.

NPAG submits that appropriate storage for radioactive waste must be the basic prerequisite of any future nuclear energy industry.

NSW has radioactive material currently stored in 269 licensed facilities in NSW (Property NSW Proposal 08_0008 PPR 4.5.2) pending the establishment of the federal facility. Critics claim this storage is inadequate and inappropriate. We argue that it is essential that the Federal Government progress the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility (NRWMF) as a matter of urgency, since NSW has not established its own radioactive storage facility.

Our experience in Nelson Parade NSW is that disposal and storage of radioactive material is a difficult issue politically, emotionally charged and often clouded by misinformation and stigma. Decisions seem to be often politically driven, not evidence-based or informed by expert opinion.

We believe that independent expert-driven decision-making is essential as a prerequisite for best practice radioactive waste management, and this needs to be fundamental in establishing a nuclear energy industry.

Successive NSW Governments have failed to resolve the radioactive contamination issue in our street in the 11 years since the 2008 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry, which unanimously recommended that the radioactive waste should be disposed off site in an appropriately licensed facility.

However the NSW Government subsequently ruled out disposal of the Nelson Parade radioactive contamination in the only appropriately licensed facility in NSW, due to community concern.

Furthermore, the Government has since failed to locate an alternative disposal/storage site either interstate or in NSW, and consequently has chosen encapsulation of the radioactive material onsite as the preferred remediation method (Proposal 08_0008), setting Australian precedent for radioactive storage in a residential street.

Under Proposal 08_0008, Property NSW seeks to permanently store the radioactive contamination on the foreshores of the densely populated residential street Nelson Parade, within 4km from the harbour bridge.

Hunters Hill Council and the majority of residents have rejected the Proposal as inappropriate.

Experts are strongly critical of the proposal, since it is widely accepted that the world's best practice is to store radioactive material in a central facility with proper licensing, monitoring and maintenance and with protection for people and the environment such as a buffer zone several kilometres from densely populated areas.

The second fundamental community concern about any Nuclear Energy Industry is health and safety.

In terms of Nelson Parade, safety is a huge concern about Property NSW's current on site encapsulation proposal.

The radioactive material is to be consolidated in the bunkers and therefore the level of radioactivity will be increased to hazardous. Ansto Report PPR 5.2 states that encapsulation will actually increase the exposure risk for a wide range of people, which has led to strong resident and community rejection of the NSW Government Proposal.

The radioactive contamination is not being taken off-site, consequently it is not classified as waste so Nelson Parade residents will have no protection from a 500m or larger buffer zone normally mandated to protect people and the environment.

No precedent of residential radioactive storage exists to evaluate safety, nor has the Government provided any evidence for safety of the proposed radon gas management. There will be no basic protections such as a tent to prevent dust ingestion and inhalation during the estimated two years of construction.

The issue will remain unresolved, leaving a legacy of monitoring and managing the encapsulated radioactive waste for succeeding generations for the life of the radioactive material (thousands of years).

In summary, our experience in NSW has exposed the difficulties for governments in disposing of radioactive waste.

This issue severely impacts on residents trapped firstly by government inaction, and subsequently by Property NSW's proposal which is opposed by community, inadequately addresses safety concerns, and is not based on best practice.

We submit that safe, highest standard radioactive waste management needs independent experts' control over planning and management, in order to ensure that the best interests of the community drive decision-making.

Ms Philippa Clark, President Nelson Parade Action Group

