

**Submission
No 24**

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

Organisation: Smithson Planning

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NSW INQUIRY : URANIUM MINING & NUCLEAR FACILITIES

Dear Sir / Madam – thank you for the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on this matter, and I would be pleased to appear before the committee to discuss our evidence if that opportunity presents.

I refer to the most recent examples of our other parliamentary inquiry submissions, which can be sourced on-line, and for which there are corresponding Federal & State briefing notes :

1. Federal ITC.reps inquiry into Australian Government’s role in the development of cities; and
2. State WALC inquiry into Local Government in Western Australia.

Background

For the benefit of the Inquiry, Smithson Planning is a sole-trader consultancy specialising in regional development, and a registered lobbyist in Western Australia – now based in Perth, but for the past 20 years operating from Albany, Mr Smithson has also lived and worked in four states and multiple regions / cities across Australia, including Sydney and rural New South Wales.

Mr Neil Smithson as the Principal of the practice holds a Master of Arts in Urban Studies (Curtin University), and has accumulated 35 years’ experience in the areas of city planning, business and regional development – and more particularly the NSW Dept Environment & Planning, Kinhill Engineers, GHD Consultants, the City of Melville (City Development Planner) and the Rural City of Mildura (Manager Business Development).

Mr Smithson is an Alumni of the Commonwealth Study Conference (2003); an Associate of Future Directions International; has also held the office of Senior Vice-President of the Albany Chamber of Commerce & Industry; and is a two-time Past-President of the Rotary Club of Albany.

Mr Smithson also contested the seat of O’Connor in the 2010 federal election (as an independent), and stood for the office of Mayor of the City of Albany in 1999 and 2015.

Context

Over the past 20 years, Smithson Planning has made multiple submissions to the State & Commonwealth Governments via inquiry and invitation, all premised around our Rainbow 2000® Project, and including :

- HoR SC PIRS - Infrastructure & Development in Regional Areas (1999)
- DoTaRS – AusLink Green Paper (2003)
- Cwth JSC NC&ET – Adequacy of funding for Australia’s Antarctic Program (2004)
- HoR SC T&RS – Transport Networks Inquiry (2006)
- HoR SC E&H – Sustainability Charter (2006)
- HoR SC E&H – Sustainable Cities 2025 (2006)
- COAG CIRA – Allen Consulting : Review of Western Australian Ports (2008)
- APH SSC F&E – Securing Australia’s Energy & Environmental Future (2008)
- APH JSC C&FS – Aspects of Agribusiness Managed Investment Schemes (2009)
- APH HoR CCWE&A – Managing our Coastal Zone in a Changing Climate (2009)
- Infrastructure Australia – National Freight Network Plan (2010)
- Infrastructure Australia – Major Cities Unit : State of Australian Cities (2010)
- Productivity Commission – Performance Benchmarking Australian Business Regulation (2010)
- Cwth DPM&C – National Commission on the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary (2010)
- Cwth DSEWP&C – Sustainable Population Strategy Taskforce (2011)
- Cwth RDA Great Southern – Regional Plan 2010-2020 (2011)
- Cwth DSEWP&C – Marine Bioregional Plan for the South-West Region (2011)
- Cwth DVA – Permit to use the word ANZAC (2011)
- APH SSC RRAT – Freight Logistics for the Grains Industry (2014)
- Senate SC RRAT – Future Role & Contribution of Regional Capitals to Australia (2015)
- HoR SC IT&C – Australian Government’s Role in the Development of Cities (2017)
- Cwth Productivity Commission – Australian Airports (2019).

Briefing Notes

Please find attached our briefing notes for this inquiry, which are a derivation of the briefing notes we have previously and consistently provided to relevant project stakeholders over the past 22 years ... typically, State & Federal politicians, and related business groups. They contain the questions that might be put to the Prime Minister and Cabinet / the Premier and Cabinet, in relation to our research project and corporate investment strategy.

On-line Reference Material

You will also find extensive background information at Smithson Planning’s website and our Facebook pages, in particular, the PowerPoint presentation that accompanies the Rainbow 2000[©] Project.

https://www.facebook.com/pg/SmithsonPlanning/photos/?tab=album&album_id=154042347988361

The Rainbow 2000[©] Project

The Rainbow 2000[©] Project is a regional planning strategy for regional development in Australia, focusing originally on Albany, Western Australia ... but now also looking at Fremantle & the Perth Metropolitan Region, and there are several regions of Australia (including NSW) now under consideration – it was published under copyright in 1997, and examines the hypothesis ... Is planning the antithesis of politics?

The project specifically identified and proposed the Albany Anzac Centenary 2014-19 commemorations and the forthcoming WA Bicentennial 2026-27-29 celebrations (Albany, Fremantle & Perth Western Australia), as major 1:100 year international tourism and business development opportunities for the city of Albany, the Great Southern Region and Western Australia ... unprecedented was the analogy in 2014, and those efforts were subsequently rewarded with national and international acclaim.

There is no reason to assume that the WA Bicentennial celebrations will not also herald another new period of growth and development for Western Australia and Australia, just as the 1988 Bicentennial for Sydney, NSW.

Part of the regional strategy includes the establishment of an Albany Port Corporation as a public private partnership (PPP), and the development of an Albany International Airport as one of the major assets of the corporation ... along with Albany sea port relocation, and a toll route ring road / railway for metropolitan freight accessibility, three very attractive commercial propositions that tangibly address the emerging planning, infrastructure, transport and city issues of the region – if all of that sounds familiar now, it is perhaps testament to how those ideas have pervaded mainstream planning & infrastructure across Australia over the past 22 years.

There are also proposals for Southern Land, Southern Power, Southern Gas, Southern Waste, and Southern Telecommunication – in addition to the support infrastructure required to deliver such goods and services to the city, towns and shires of the Great Southern region.

In a Western Australian context, I would advocate two appropriately sized nuclear power stations (one in the south-west and one in the north-west), as well as a dedicated export handling and refuelling facility near Port Hedland in the Pilbara Region, serviced by a new 'eastern infrastructure corridor' from Port Hedland to Esperance.

In much the same way as the Commonwealth addressed site selection processes for alternative nuclear waste management & storage in November 2015, I would advocate that each State & Territory should now undertake its own nuclear energy assessment process – and it may well be that the result thereof is to not provide such facilities, but to engage by mutual agreement a facility proposed by another Australian State or Territory.

Clearly, energy and environment are major considerations for all urban, rural and remote areas of Australia.

Thematic Analysis

As a function of project research over the past 20 years, Smithson Planning has also documented on Facebook various thematic issues pertaining to project observation, management and implementation, including :

- The Anzac Centenary 2014-19 (Volumes 01-23 & Volume 100 : the Centenary Events)
- Albany Anzac 2014-18 (Volumes 01-10)
- **Peak Oil, Gas & Nuclear Power (Volumes 01-17)**
- WA Farmers – issues in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (Volumes 01-09)
- Rainbow 2000 – a Regional Planning Strategy for Albany & the Great Southern (Volumes 01-17)
- Rainbow 2000 – the Commonwealth Government Response (Volumes 01-13)
- Rainbow 2000 – the State Government Response (Volumes 01-19)
- Rainbow 2000 – the Local Government Response (Volumes 01-08)
- Rainbow 2000 – the Private Sector Response (Volumes 01-18)
- Rainbow 2000 – the Media Response (Volumes 01-23)
- Albany Waterfront Project & Entertainment Centre (Volumes 01-08).

In the context of extant and emerging energy security, transport and environmental issues from a local to a global scale, I could comfortably recommend a further presentation just on **Peak Oil, Gas & Nuclear Power**, alone.

Regional Analysis

The project has evolved as a regional strategy for Australian regional development, and as I indicated at the National SEGRA Conference 2016 held in Albany, now includes planning strategies for several regions and their cities around Australia, including :

- Kimberley 2020 (Volumes 01-02)
- Pilbara 2020 (Volumes 01-04)
- Gascoyne 2020 (Volume 01)
- Batavia 2020 (Volumes 01-02)
- Avon 2020 (Volumes 01-02)

- Perth North Metropolitan (Volume 01-11)
- Fremantle South Metropolitan (Volume 01-12)
- Peel 2020 (Volumes 01)
- Leeuwin 2020 (Volumes 01-03)
- Recherche Goldfields 2020 (Volumes 01-03)

- Eyre 2020 (Volume 01)
- Sunraysia 2020 (Volume 01)
- Riverina 2020 (Volume 01)
- Alpine 2020 (Volume 01)
- Orana Blue 2020 (Volume 01)
- Capricornia 2020 (Volume 01)
- Brisbane SEQ 2020 (Volume 01)
- Leichhardt 2020 (Volume 01)
- Arnhem 2020 (Volume 01)
- MacDonnell 2020 (Volume 01).

Peak Oil, Gas & Nuclear Power

It is apparent from our energy observations over the past 22 years (17 volumes – 200 stories in each) that Australia has migrated from energy discovery in the early part of the 20th Century, through importation & refinery, two global wars (several regional ideological wars), energy self-sufficiency, dependence, depletion, industry closures, and is now re-emerging as a global energy powerhouse (gas, coal, uranium & thorium).

I believe most Australians are aware of that emerging relative power / responsibility, as too, are the rest of the advanced nations of the world – we are in effect, becoming the new Middle East of Asia ... a very attractive commercial proposition, and strategically vulnerable growth and development asset for future investment.

Most commentators estimate that Australia passed through ‘Peak Oil’ in 2010, and that we are now well and truly into the terminal years of domestic oil production ... indeed virtually zero reserves of heavy crude oil (construction), and limited reserves of light crude oil (transport).

The facts in evidence are that over the past 22 years :

- (1) Various energy companies have misrepresented their known & proven reserves of oil & gas in the marketplace, resulting in destabilising industry investment, funding & confidence;
- (2) Some governments have embraced exploration & production techniques that they perhaps would rather not have, but for economic necessity were compelled to pursue (fracking & oil sands);
- (3) That despite the extraordinary natural hydrocarbon resources available to them, some countries and their governments are (a) investing in nuclear technology, and (b) they also appear incapable of managing their domestic economies for the benefit of all their citizens as a function of corruption and restricted international trade;
- (4) That war & disunity continue to dog those regions at the centre of energy trade & uncertainty; and
- (5) The nations of the world struggle with the dichotomy of nuclear energy production, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, energy risk management, health industry revolution and climate change.

Despite the expansion of the Australian energy market and regulator (noting the relative East / West divide in operations); with multiple power producers across various resource sectors; offering alternative energy generation systems; wholesale & retail pricing packages to both on-sellers and consumers; the extensive government incentives to augment power supply and security, subsequent power networks have failed spectacularly on several occasions, putting governance itself at risk (WA, Tas & SA).

There are entire regional communities that have evolved (through several generations of families) around the mining of coal (or hydro), the generation of electrical power, and the distribution of that power via transmission lines to the market place (capital cities, regional towns and remote industry) – where the realisation of household solar energy and to a lesser extent wind power has completely altered their spatial relevance to resource, and the delivery of cost-effective baseload power supply (creating further uncertainty).

It is self-evident that the traditional combustion engine transport industry model is in serious decline as a function of energy security and air quality emissions, and that the transitional model includes gas substitution in advance of conversion to an electric fleet of cars and trucks (other land transport vehicles) – but that model is probably not applicable at sea or in the air, which has major implications for international trade & commerce (and defence).

Indeed, whereas some cities, regions and nations have declared that new vehicle petrol and diesel sales will be banned in the near future; that they may be banned from operating in congested urban centres; that other centres are pursuing improvements in fleet air quality emissions; shipping and aircraft emissions; that some vehicle manufacturers have deliberately falsified their air quality emissions results to satisfy regulators ... Australia is yet to take any action along those lines to date.

The main reason the federal government still supports the one and only nuclear power plant in Australia at Lucas Heights in Sydney is the tacit research platform and production of nuclear medical health materials to support diagnostic and treatment of human suffering. The reality is that until several years ago, Australia did not support an academic program in nuclear physics at a recognised university or tertiary education institution – the supply of people who think about nuclear energy, its development, and also administer the operations of such facilities.

The people of Australia perhaps have every right to be critical of the CSIRO and ANSTO for the lack of dialogue / advocacy for nuclear energy research and development – and yet, the status quo is itself a reflection of the lack of political will to address energy security and global environmental management.

In the face of global uncertainty across multiple sectors, the reality is that Australia is participating in a major expansion of its own defence capabilities including capital ships and support bases, wherein the direct question exists as to the probable fuel source most relevant to establishing and maintaining a future defensive position both for and with allied forces in our region and elsewhere in the world – the logical assumption being that a Royal Australian Naval ship (surface or submarine) is best equipped with a nuclear power plant, to remain at sea in operations as well as return to Australia for replenishment.

That still doesn't address critical issues of fuels for aviation, air warfare, rapid deployment and disaster recovery, let alone the production and refinery of hydrocarbon products related to plastics – in effect, we have transitioned from unrestricted use in society and the fundamental support structures of transport & communications, to a position of better regulating the depletion of finite resources, and perhaps scheduled exploration and harvesting of new resources in more problematic locations, like the deep oceans and the polar regions.

What we do know is that :

- (6) Australia has significant known resources of coal, gas, uranium, thorium ... and a very low level of population relative to an extraordinarily large land mass / coastal area and settlement opportunity;
- (7) It takes considerable time and political will to engage with and employ the technology for the construction of nuclear power generation capacity (min. 10 years) regardless of political circumstance, in a relatively 'loose' regulatory framework;
- (8) That many countries are now in the process of investing in that new market capacity, because they believe they need to, and should be in order to diversify their energy resources and limit risk;
- (9) There are very powerful emerging corporate interests that both supply and demand a nuclear response to issues of energy security and global climate change, that won't tolerate or accept a non-participatory stance from an allegedly democratic governance on ideological grounds; and
- (10) The people of Australia are themselves calling for change, or at least the scope for change.

Project Prognosis

There are several very good questions that need to be asked and answered as best possible, assuming the Government does or does not already have a grasp of the situation (like) –

- (A) If Australia transitioned through peak oil in 2010, how long will our own domestic resources last before we are completely dependent on imported crude products;
- (B) What are the similar assessments of all global continents / nations & regions, and who is genuinely conveying their accurate position in that regard;
- (C) Who are our critical international partners for the supply of heavy crude & light crude oil, and what is the future relationship between those product source locations and Australian refining capacity;
- (D) Where should Australia be investing in the national gas network, providing links and security of supply to government, industry, business and community;
- (E) What is the relative disposition of the transport task as pertains to the distribution of goods and services supported by vehicles dependent on petrol, diesel, gas, electric, hydrogen;
- (F) Relative to nuclear energy and export capacity, which Australian uranium / thorium production fields would be better served / require dedicated / regulated export port facilities, and where should they be located relative to transport infrastructure and risk management; and
- (G) To what extent and how should the Australian governance facilitate the introduction of nuclear power generation in Australia / States & Territories, both in a fiscal and regulatory capacity, as well as the subsequent storage, handling, collection and disposal of fuel supply and waste management.

Conclusions

Most of our collected evidence is anecdotal, but in the absence of well researched data, academic rigour and independent analysis and verification (and I recommend all of those pursuits), I would suggest that the heavy crude oil will run out in the 2030s; the light crude oil will run out in the 2040s; gas will run out say around 2110s ... I invite the Government to nominate their considered likely dates.

Based on current global demand, there is about 2,500 years of uranium and a further 2,500 years of thorium supply, in the knowledge that a thorium source requires an ignition source to create the initial reaction – that presumes as a global society that we would really rather not violate the deepest oceans, the polar regions, the mountain ranges, the deserts and the rainforests ... or go to war to ensure energy security.

What that means is that the infrastructure decisions we now make over the next 20 years will be extremely important to the future of human settlement within Australia or overseas – and that Australia is currently in an excellent position to proactively manage the introduction of nuclear energy to both ourselves, and facilitate other nations / regions across the globe (in exchange for technology and resources) ... a position that could conceivably change quite quickly were the circumstances to warrant or arise.

One final proposition arises – that is the question as to whether Australia can afford not to engage in some form of nuclear energy program at this time ... and how long that policy position might remain applicable, and how we negotiate bipartisan commitment to the process.

I had occasion to make our standard Rainbow 2000[®] Project presentation to the Western Australian Planning Commission on 24 October 2018, and doubt based on the response as to whether there was any real comprehension of the issues at stake – suffice to say those discussions stirred very little thought and response, and no action ... what I refer to as the tyranny of regional indifference from Perth and Canberra (we know better).

It is fair to say that our research is unique – I am unaware of any other similar program.

I trust our submission meets with your expectations, and I would be pleased to provide further information / address your questions as appropriate.

Yours faithfully
SMITHSON PLANNING

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