Supplementary Submission No 12a

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

Organisation: Azark Project

Date Received: 18 October 2019

NEW SOUTH WALES

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT

COMMENTS ON ISSUES RAISED BY PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH SERVICE

While the submission on behalf of the Azark Project was lodged with the committee on state development inquiry on 20 August 2019 it was thought worthwhile to offer some comments on the issues paper recently released by The Parliamentary Research Service to assist with the inquiry.

However in doing so it should be recognised that the submission by Azark is limited to its proposed underground nuclear waste facility which is located outside of New South Wales and hence some of the issues raised in the issues paper are not pertinent to its proposals.

To begin with there are two general but important factors which need to be considered in any event.

The first is that any progress or development of the nuclear industry in Australia including the mining of uranium must be done as a completely national and unified endeavour without any competition or rivalry between the states and the federal government.

The second is that the abolition or repeal of all prohibitive legislation by the federal and state governments must go hand in glove with the national and unified approach to the nuclear industry.

This also applies to any enabling legislation for the nuclear industry which as a whole must be uniform and corresponding as between the Commonwealth and the states and ensure that it overcomes all possible constitutional conflicts.

Taking the overseas examples and experiences as a guide it is essential that a nuclear generation industry in Australia be national and uniform with a central regulatory regime even if at present power generation is constitutionally a state domain.

Despite its land size the population of Australia is far too small for a disjointed state regime for such a huge and important industry as nuclear power generation.

Turning specifically to the Azark Project its comments on the issues relevant to it and following the same numbering sequence as in the issues paper are as follows:

(2) As was pointed out in the submission by Azark it is necessary to have a proper means of nuclear waste disposal before the commencement of nuclear power generation.

While like any technological or scientific area the nuclear industry is of continuing development it is understood and in fact prescribed that the best and safest methods of disposal of nuclear waste is by underground geological burial in a suitable environment which by world standards is completely satisfied by the proposed facility of Azark at Leonora.

It is very doubtful if any developments in the near future would replace geological burial as a proper means of disposal.

(9) As already mentioned the optimum way of managing radioactive waste from nuclear power generation is by underground burial in circumstances similar to that being undertaken by Posiva at Onkalo in Finland.

Posiva is in fact a consultant to Azark And one in the underground

facility at Leonora would at this stage be limited to the permanent disposal of intermediate level waste it could be because of its geological setting be developed in the future into a deep disposal facility as at Onkalo.

It should be remembered that the area of the Azark facility at Leonora was apparently the ultimate location chosen by Pangea Resources for its underground facility to dispose of the highest level of nuclear waste that was produced overseas and was only stopped by urgent local legislative action in Western Australia(1).

The transport of even the highest levels of nuclear radioactive waste is technically well developed and advanced and would not create any difficulty by being transported to Leonora from all parts of Australia for permanent disposal as a central national facility for that purpose.

Because of its mining and resources industries Leonora already has substantial radioactive material regularly passing by road and rail transport within its townsite.

From the foregoing comments it can be shown that radioactive waste from nuclear power generation can be managed in the safest and most acceptable manner by international best standards irrespective of where the waste was produced.

(11) The optimal regulatory settings to ensure the safe and secure operation of nuclear waste disposal would be to comply fully with the standards prescribed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)(2) as adopted in Australia by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA)(3).

However it would be necessary to expand the legislative powers of ARPANSA so that it would be able to regulate nuclear activities

outside of the federal government as was submitted on its behalf to the federal inquiry into the prerequisites for nuclear energy in Australia.

It would also be necessary to have continued research and contact with various institutions including universities specifically dealing with nuclear power and with others actively involved in the nuclear industry.

This would particularly apply to industry participants such as Posiva to gain additional and continued practical knowledge.

(16) From experience gained by Azark in the Leonora region the best method of including the community in decisions about its specific objectives for establishing its nuclear waste disposal facility is to provide as much information as possible on a personal basis.

This is possible to achieve in Leonora because of its relatively small but widely dispersed population and the fact that the Project was initiated and partly driven by the Shire of Leonora as the local government body controlling the region.

It has from the outset been intended that part of the revenues from the operation of the facility would be used or applied towards payments for various civic and health benefits and amenities which in most cases were actually sought by the local community as they were not being provided by the federal and state governments.

This meant that in a rather special set of circumstances community approval was more readily obtained then if Azark were purely a commercial undertaking for the financial gain of its promoters.

Although it is difficult to give a general overview it is felt that rather slick and colourful presentations and campaign promotional meetings have limited effect as they cause unnecessary doubt and fail to give a

fair and lucid explanation of the true facts.

Survey results on page 85

These are somewhat surprising results considering the degree of recent discussion and animus regarding nuclear power leading to your committee's and the other two parliamentary inquiries.

On the assumption that those results are near accurate then there seems to be little prospect of general community support for a nuclear industry but these may be from a lack of full understanding of the significant benefits of nuclear power.

For and on behalf of Azark Project Pty Ltd (ACN 618 973 792)

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(Executive Director)

17 October 2019

NOTES:

(1) Nuclear Waste Storage and Transportation (Prohibition) Act 1999

(2) Safety Standards Classification of Waste General Safety Guide No. GSG–1

(3) SAFETY GUIDE - Classification of Radioactive Waste Radiation Protection Series Publication No. 20 - April 2010