

Watermark

Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (NSW)

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Poisoning the Heartland

*I am born of the land, my soul is the sun
 Nature is my mother, I am, mother nature's own son
 The wind is my spirit, running wild, running free
 The water is my mirror, reflecting visions of me
 I am like a great river that slowly runs dry
 Polluted and abused I am the river, slowly - I die
 I am a child of the earth, created from dust
 I live for the land, taking only what I must
 I am a hunter of animals, imitating their stance
 I am a painter of walls, I am an artist of dreams
 Depicting mythological creatures, and spirits in my scenes
 I am from the never never, a long time gone by
 The Dreaming is my creation, I am at home when I die
 I own no land, for the land owns me
 That's the way it has been, how it always will be
 For I am what I am - I am - Aborigine*

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www.dreamtime.auz.net

Northern Territory Nuclear Waste Dump

Given our commitment to reconciliation, social justice and care for the environment the current government's plan for a nuclear waste dump in the Northern Territory should be of concern to all. This issue of **Watermark** expresses the great need for collaboration with the communities of the Northern Territory and their desire to be heard and taken seriously.

As the CLRI core values remind us; our concern is to promote the dignity of each person by promoting human rights, especially the rights of those who lack services or access to goods, and those whose participation in significant community discussions is stifled or trivialised. Let us not forget the value of human dignity as we fight for justice and equality for the Aboriginal people of Australia.

In the beginning...

The Australia Government had not always planned on using Northern Territory sites as nuclear waste dumps. Original plans proposed dumping nuclear waste from the Lucas Heights reactor at a facility in South Australia. Due to the strong campaigns from locals against the storage of nuclear waste in their local area this plan was not followed through. Without consultation and it seems with little thought, plan 'B' is a waste dump in the Northern Territory.

If the government believed or hoped that this decision would slip under the radar of activists, or receive little opposition, they were more than slightly misled. Although several media reports portrayed local Northern Territory communities as accepting of this proposal, due to \$12 million payout to traditional landowners in the area, this could not be further from the truth.

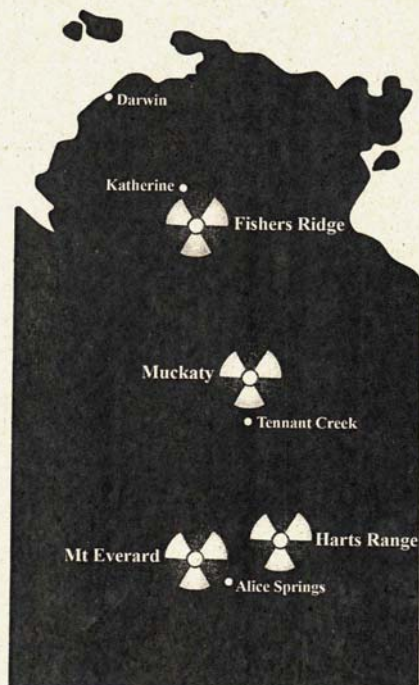
Perhaps more important than whether or not those from the proposed dump sites do or don't approve of the decision, is the fact that community consultation with traditional owners did not and continues not to occur. Power lies in having a choice over decisions which will affect land, community, family and health and this has been taken away from Northern Territorians.



"As Arrente people it is our responsibility to protect the land for future generations of our people and all people in the community; to protect the environment of the plants, animals, birds, and landscape."

Benedict Stevens

Targeting the Territory: Proposed sites for the Federal radioactive waste dump



Muckaty Land Trust, located 120km north of Tennant Creek, traditional owners are the Arrente people. The land is managed by the Northern Land Council and currently leased for pastoral use.

Fishers Ridge, located 42km south east of Katherine, traditional owners are the Jawoyn people. Nearest neighbours own a pastoral station which circles the proposed site, with their home only 4km away. The land is currently used by the Department of Defence for training.

Alcoota (Harts Range): located 165km north east of Alice Springs, traditional owners are the Arrente people. Nearest neighbours are the Engawala community and the Alcoota cattle station 18km away. The land is currently used by the Department of Defence.

Athenge Lhere (Mt Everard): located 40km north west of Alice Springs, traditional owners are the Arrente people. Nearest neighbours are the Were Therre community, only 3km away. The land is currently used by the Department of Defence.

Waste not, want not

Claims have been laid that the waste proposed to be dumped at the Northern Territory is low level and poses no great harm to Territorians. However, surely if this were the case it would be more efficient to store the waste on site at Lucas Heights. The radioactive waste dump in the Northern Territory would house the highest level of radioactive waste that is produced within this country. I don't know about you, but I certainly wouldn't want that dumped in my backyard, despite what 'officials' may say about the level of risk it presents.

One of the substances likely to be stored at the proposed nuclear waste dump is reprocessed spent nuclear fuel which contains plutonium, a substance with extremely long-lived toxicity. Other waste likely to end up at the proposed Northern Territory dump includes, 50 cubic metres of radioactive waste produced at Lucas Heights, 130 drums of radioactive low level solid waste per year, such as used vials and gloves, roughly 20 drums per year of solidified radioactive waste, over 5,000 drums of low level radioactive waste, 200 cubic metres of intermediate level solid waste and over 2,000 litres of radioactive charcoal, to name a few. No doubt if this proposed dump succeeds much more waste will end up on the door step of many communities in the Northern Territory.



"I would rather have it in the Northern Territory than in Mount Barker just down the road from my electorate office"
Alexander Downer

"...all the sites in the NT are well away from houses...some distance from any form of civilization"
Julie Bishop

From the Heart for the Heartland

It must be mentioned that much of the information used in writing this issue of **Watermark** has not come from CLRI(NSW) research alone. Information was received from "From the Heart for the Heartland" a speaking tour held from June 12-26th this year. Local Territorians, and those working with the communities in the Northern Territory, were invited to speak out against a radioactive waste dump in the Territory. The pamphlet from this event, which I hope to share, fuelled much of the discussion in this edition and contains some powerful messages from members of the local communities affected by the dump.

"I live just about 5kms from the proposed dump, and I'd like to keep the place clean for my children, my grandchildren and further generations, and 'cause we go out hunting there, we go for our bush tuckers".
Audrey McCormack.

"We stand strong in our own culture as Indigenous People, and want the land and water to be protected for our children, black and white".
Mitch

"Whoever is taking this waste dump into our country needs to come back and talk to the Traditional Owners. We're not happy to have all this stuff. We don't want it, it's not our spirit. Our spirit is our country, our country where our ancestors been born".
Dianne Stokes

"The Government does not respect our way of life, and they have not talked to us. The Government have their law, but we have ours, which the elders uphold".
Benedict Stevens

"We don't want the dump because it is nuclear and nuclear material can be used for making bombs. It can blow up the rivers, kill birds and animals, and may kill people too if they are too close".
Priscilla Williams

"It may not affect us in my lifetime but for generations to come if something should happen then they're gonna be stuck with it. Even though it's low level waste it's still toxic".
Steve Atkinson

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We are on the Web!
www.clrinsw.org

You can read past
issues of
Watermark
on our website!

A source of strength:

"If ever I feel the struggle for a more just and fair society is too hard I need only to remember the image of three Aboriginal women who came from some of the most remote communities in the Northern Territory and spoke at the "From the Heart for the Heartland" meeting at Redfern on a cold June night this year. What courage it must have taken for them to stand in front of the largely non-Aboriginal audience and tell us of their fears for their land and people if the proposed nuclear dumps go ahead.

Their quiet dignity and strength of spirit captured all present as in Aboriginal English they spoke of their culture and desire to preserve it for their people.

Arrernte woman Audrey McCormack said, "I live just about 5kms from the proposed dump and I'd like to keep the place clean for my children, my grandchildren and future generations".

Diane Stokes, a Muckaty Traditional Owner said "Top to bottom we got bush tucker right through the country. We're not happy to have all this stuff. We don't want it. It's not our spirit".

And Mitch, the feisty Eastern Arrernte and Luritja woman said "If this nuclear waste is so safe why can't they keep it at the Lucas heights nuclear plant in Sydney?"

If ever I needed motivation to continue to struggle for justice for Aboriginal peoples this meeting and these women provided it in spades! I can only hope that enough of us will have some of their courage and determination to help stop the Federal Government poisoning the Heartland."

Sr Margaret Hinchey's personal account of attending the "From the Heart for the Heartland" meeting.

Links

Nuclear:

Australian Government
www.environment.gov.au

Treehugger
www.treehugger.com

ABC News Online
www.abc.net.au/news

ABC Science Lab
www.abc.net.au/science

Climate Change:

Edmund Rice Centre
www.erc.org

Catholic Earthcare
www.catholicearthcareoz.net

Australian Conservation
Foundation
www.acfonline.org.au

Greenpeace
www.greenpeace.org.au

NSW Government
www.greenhouse.nsw.gov.au

Sydney Morning Herald
www.smh.com.au/environment

Blackle- the environmentally
friendly search engine!
www.blackle.com