

The Environment Centre NT

GPO Box 2120 Darwin NT 0801

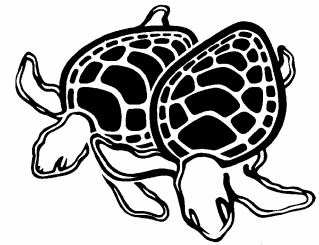
Telephone: (08) 8981 1984

coordinator@ecnt.org

98 Wood St, Darwin NT 0800

Facsimile: (08) 8941 0387

<http://www.ecnt.org>



Re: Inquiry into Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament

The Environment Centre of the NT congratulates the Prime Minister for his government's actions to renew focus on the growing challenge of stemming nuclear weapons proliferation, and the imperative to pursue disarmament. We welcome this inquiry and appreciate the opportunity to contribute.

From the outset, when considering *'the international treaties involving Australia which relate to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament'* and *'how these treaties advance Australia's objectives in this field'* it is important to recognise that, in addition to those international agreements that advance our objectives, there are treaties that actually work against the very same objectives, and in fact exacerbate the growing problem of both proliferation and the entrenchment of nuclear arms as a feature of global politics.

These are of course our uranium export treaties.

Despite the oft-repeated assurances as to the neutrality of Australia's uranium exports, it is blindingly obvious that every drum of yellowcake exported from Australia only adds to the amount of material available for nuclear weapons states to maintain their nuclear arms, and for non-weapons states to develop them.

The five 'declared' nuclear weapons states – those who have resisted the imperative for disarmament the longest, and whose poor examples have encouraged other nations to pursue similar weapons of mass destruction – continue to demonstrate the clear relationship between their nuclear power programs and their ongoing WMD programs. The other known nuclear weapons states each attained the capability through their original civilian power programs. At least 10 more nations are known to have used their so-called 'peaceful' nuclear facilities to conduct secret research into nuclear weapons.

And so it is a source of great disappointment to recognise that the current government might continue the previous coalition policy of ramping up Australia's uranium exports – the very source of much of the world's growing nuclear WMD problem. In particular, the recent milestone of Australia's first export of uranium to China, an un-democratic nuclear weapons state that refuses to recognise the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This backwards step signals the deep chasm between election-time promises of improved controls on Australian uranium and the reality of our readiness to deal with nations that not only refuse to budge towards disarmament, but also sit outside what little structure exists to control the risk posed by these ultimate weapons of mass destruction to life on earth.

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It has sometimes been inaccurately proposed that our role as a uranium exporter gives Australia a strong position in advocating for disarmament and contributing to international efforts to control the proliferation of nuclear materials and technologies. Unfortunately, the evidence is to the contrary. While Australia has been a major exporter of uranium for some decades, we have not been rewarded with any recent progress towards disarmament – in fact, those 'declared' weapons states which once committed to the shared goal of disarmament have each recently embarked on programs for a new generation of nuclear weapons, designed not for deterrence but for deployment.

Similarly, our role as a major exporter has not been a successful tool for assuring control over the international spread of weapons capabilities. Many insist that claims of an Iraqi nuclear weapons program were at best misguided, but most probably disingenuous. Nonetheless, it remains noteworthy that our nation remains involved in a war predicated on this imagined threat. Since that outbreak, concerns have only grown about other nations perceived to be growing nuclear capabilities and developing expertise in this area. Setting the veracity of these concerns aside, it is testament to their own lack of faith in the NPT and other international efforts to control nuclear proliferation that the world's leaders remain so acutely tuned to the threat of more and more nations developing these weapons of mass destruction.

The Environment Centre of the NT recommend that the greatest possible incentive Australia could provide for nuclear weapons states to work towards disarmament is to cut off their supply of Australian uranium. Quite logically, if nations who currently maintain a redundant arsenal of nuclear war heads that no-one in their right mind would use, while importing Australian uranium to fuel nuclear power plants, cessation of that Australian supply would provide real pressure on those nations to decommission weapons for fuel. Similarly, the best way to discourage other nations from pursuing nuclear weapons capabilities is to discourage participation in the nuclear power industry. One very practical way for Australia to exert influence over the international adoption of nuclear power is to retain safe custody over undisturbed uranium ore bodies.

International agreements :

That said, there is great value, and much opportunity, to be recognised in the review of those instruments which do attempt to contribute to limit proliferation. Recently, an inquiry into the proposed export of Australian uranium to Russia exposed a number of deficiencies in the so-called international safeguards efforts. Most notably, this committee rightly recommended that the International Atomic Energy Agency requires further resourcing – a fact which has been well described elsewhere¹.

Bilateral agreements :

While there are of course bilateral agreements between Australia and our uranium customers, the terms of these agreements rely totally on the regulatory capacity of the IAEA.

In addition to the IAEA's significant capacity constraints, that see only a fraction of eligible stockpiles and facilities actually subject to inspection, the Agency's work is characterised by accounting

discrepancies (the regular reporting of 'material unaccounted for') and institutionalised loopholes (such as the exclusion of military nuclear establishments from IAEA inspection regimes).

Given the well defined and dramatic shortcomings to the systems and procedures on which Australia's agreements rely, it is particularly disturbing that national authorities continue to offer absolute assurances that all Australian uranium can be accounted for. The Energy Science Coalition has described the role played by the Australian Safeguards and Non-proliferation Office (ASNO) as '*unrealistic sugar-coating of false assurance*'. In '*A Critique of the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office*'² the Coalition recommends an inquiry to review ASNO's structure, function and independence. It would seem highly appropriate for this committee to recognise the opportunity to explore the questions raised as to conflicts between ASNO's function and the Office's relationships.

US military alliance

Australia's participation in an alliance with a nuclear weapons nation, the only nation to have used a nuclear weapon in war, is a great obstacle to the goal of global disarmament. IAEA director Mohamed ElBaradei once told the United Nations : "*As long as some countries place strategic reliance on nuclear weapons as a deterrent, other countries will emulate them. We cannot delude ourselves into thinking otherwise.*"³ Australia must join other nations in demonstrating a new geo-political strategy that is independent of nuclear arms.

Conclusion :

ECNT recommends that Australia should :

- not enter into any new uranium export agreements with any nation;
- suspend export treaties with China, and all other client nations who have yet to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty;
- redouble lobbying efforts for improved funding and other resourcing of the IAEA;
- continue our renewed efforts at encouraging nuclear weapons states to revive the concept of disarmament;
- abandon the US Alliance, until such time as America abandons the U.S. Nuclear Posture, and embraces the goal of total elimination of their arsenal;
- plan for phasing down uranium mining in Australia, turning off the flow of nuclear WMD materials at their source.

Thankyou,

Justin Tutty
for Environment Centre, NT

contact: 0424-028-741
justin@nonuk.es

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