

URANIUM

The mining and export of Australian uranium remains a controversial issue. The 1982 Platform of the Australian Labor Party incorporated a compromise policy for the phasing down of the uranium industry. The ALP is divided on this issue, and the smaller centre party, the Australian Democrat Party strongly opposes mining and export. The present Labor government policy and its implications was briefly noted in [1984] Australian I.L. News 44. □ Since that note, the following items are of interest. □ It is reported that France has threatened to suspend its purchases of Australian steaming coal if Australia does not resume uranium exports suspended in June 1983 by the Australian Prime Minister, during a European tour. This was in reply to French nuclear testing in the Pacific. The New South Wales coal industry sells steaming coal worth Aus.\$45 million to the French electrical authority : The Australian 17 May 1984 at 2. □ On 1 June 1984, the Customs (Prohibition of Importation of Nuclear Hardware) Bill 1984 was defeated in the Senate. The Bill, introduced by the Democrat leader, Senator Chipp, was intended to prevent the development of nuclear industry in Australia.

When the government permitted the development of the Roxby Downs uranium mine in 1983, it commissioned the Australian Science and Technology Council to conduct an inquiry into Australian involvement in the nuclear fuel cycle. The inquiry focussed primarily on the issues of non-proliferation, safeguards and waste management. The Council, chaired by Professor Ralph Slayter, has now completed its report, which was tabled in Parliament on 31 May 1984 : Sydney Morning Herald, 1 June 1984 at 3, 12. Its recommendations are:-

- . Exports of Australian uranium should not be limited as a matter of principle, but should be permitted subject to stringent conditions of supply designed to strengthen the non-proliferation regime.
- . Australia should continue to give high priority to active and constructive participation in disarmament and arms control negotiations. A principal objective should be a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty.
- . Australia should promote the acceptance by supplier states that they should not provide nuclear items to non-nuclear weapon states which are not members of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or a treaty of similar coverage, under which International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards are applied to all those states nuclear facilities at all times.
- . Australia should continue to support proposals for a nuclear weapons free zone in the South Pacific and for an Indian Ocean zone of peace. Australia should also examine the feasibility of a regional treaty, or treaties, involving southern and eastern Asia and Australia, based on non-proliferation concepts contained in the Treaty of Tlatelolco
- . Australia should encourage further development of international guidelines and procedures for the supply of nuclear items, with a view to ensuring that countries which are

parties to the non-proliferation treaty, or a treaty of similar coverage, are advantaged. Australia should also encourage broader participation in forums which are developing lists of items which may form the basis of countries export control regulations.

- . Australia should ratify the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and introduce the necessary enabling legislation. ASTEC also recommends that physical protection standards and measures, applied to nuclear material in use, storage and transport within Australia, should be incorporated in regulations. The standards and measures should accord, as a minimum, with those recommended by the International Atomic Energy Agency.
- . Australia should continue to encourage the establishment of a scheme to regulate effectively the storage and use of sensitive nuclear material. Such a scheme should incorporate the concepts of a use statement and verification by the International Atomic Energy Agency of such use.

Australia should actively encourage the concept that sensitive facilities - particularly enrichment and reprocessing plants - should be located in as few countries as possible. At the same time, Australia should encourage the concept of joint ownership and supervision of such facilities, both in a global and regional context, and the application to them of the most stringent safeguards

- . Australian participation in stages of the nuclear fuel cycle - in addition to uranium mining and milling - should be permitted, where such participation promotes and strengthens the non-proliferation regime.

Australia should take the necessary action, in consultation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, to provide further resources to the agency and encourage other member countries to do the same, so that the agency can improve the effectiveness of its safeguards operations.

- . Australia should continue to play an active role in supporting the International Atomic Energy Agency's program of technical assistance and co-operation, including the Regional Co-operative Agreement. Australia should also fund suitable selected projects, provided that the beneficiaries are parties to the non-proliferation treaty, or a treaty of similar coverage.
- . Every effort should be made to maintain and enhance Australian influence in the International Atomic Energy Agency, and in particular:
 - (i) Australia should take steps to maintain and strengthen its credentials for designation to the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency.
 - (ii) Australia should give consideration to the creation of a separate mission to the International Atomic Energy Agency and ensure that representation in the Australian permanent delegation is adequate to allow

effective Australian participation in all important negotiations and discussions.

- (iii) Australia should make available well qualified candidates for significant and responsible positions in the International Atomic Energy Agency.
- . Australia should take steps to ensure that nuclear material, extracted for nuclear purposes from Australian ores, after export would become subject to a safeguards agreement to which Australia is a party.
 - . Australia should enter into discussions with governments of countries with which Australia has no bilateral safeguards agreements and within whose jurisdictions Australian origin nuclear material is trans-shipped, with a view to concluding government to government arrangements covering the application of physical protection measures to such material.
 - . Australia should seek agreement with its bilateral partners to make public the texts of the administrative arrangements in such a way as to avoid adverse implications for physical protection and commercial confidentiality.
 - . Australia, through its membership of appropriate international organisations, should take action to promote the establishment of internationally agreed approaches to the limitation of releases of effluents containing radioactive material that may cross international boundaries.

Australia should proceed as quickly as possible to complete a code of practice for the disposal of radioactive waste arising from medical, industrial and research use of radionuclides; to identify sites suitable for disposal of low level radioactive waste; and to the development of facilities for interim storage and disposal of low and intermediate level radioactive waste.

- . The relevant national safety standards for radiation exposure associated with uranium mining and milling should continue to be reviewed regularly and incorporated in Federal, State and Territory regulatory procedures; and the observance of these prescribed standards should be appropriately monitored.
- . The Federal Government, acting with State and Territory Governments as appropriate, should ensure that the safety and environmental monitoring aspects of uranium mining and milling in Australia are soundly established and carried out.

The Federal Government, with State and Territory Governments, should establish and maintain a national registry of radioactive tailings and waste disposal sites. The administration of the registry should be designed to ensure, as far as is possible, that the records it contains are maintained for as long as the sites to which they refer might constitute a hazard to people or to the environment. The sites themselves should be identified on the ground by long-lasting markers.

- . Australia should ratify the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and other Matter (the London Dumping Convention), and join the OECD multilateral consultation and surveillance mechanism for sea dumping of radioactive waste.
- . Australia should continue to recognise the concern of island and seaboard countries within the South Pacific region to maintain the oceans as a resource for all mankind and use its influence in international forums to urge other countries, whenever appropriate, to form regional groupings within the framework of the London Dumping Convention to prohibit, or severely restrict, dumping of radioactive materials in that region.
- . Australia should participate actively in scientific assessments of ocean dumping of radioactive waste.
- . Pending the outcome of those assessments, Australia should support a moratorium on the ocean dumping of radioactive waste.
- . Australia should support Australian participation in research and development on the disposal of high level radioactive waste and for co-operation with other countries and with international agencies in such research.

Australia should continue to support research and development on the advanced waste form Synroc. Provided that the apparent advantages of Synroc are confirmed by further research, Australia should encourage further international co-operation in Synroc development - with the aim of securing its widest possible use.

- . Australia should encourage the development of international guidelines and codes of practice for the storage and disposal of spent fuel and high level waste - including an agreed basis for assessing the adequacy of waste form and repository performance over long periods.
- . Australia should not seek to impose particular strategies for radioactive waste management on countries using Australian uranium, but rather encourage all countries to adopt the best practicable, rather than merely adequate, waste management strategies.

The Report is expected to be of considerable assistance in any move to further relax government policy on the uranium industry.

The Slayter Report rejects the argument strongly advanced by opponents to the industry that an Australian ban on exports and a winding down of the industry would have a significant effect on nuclear weapons proliferation. It says there is no point in refusing to supply uranium to countries with nuclear weapons programmes as they have alternative sources of supply. By being a reliable long term supplier of uranium, Australia will reduce to some degree the motivation to seek greater energy security by reprocessing and the use of fast breeder reactors. The acceptance of Australia's very strenuous safeguards against the diversion of nuclear materials to weapons ". . . may encourage other suppliers of nuclear weapons, as well as of uranium, to insist on comparable

conditions. On the question of waste disposal, the other main reason for opposition to the industry, the report concludes that while there are problems, the technology exists for safe disposal. On the economic viability of the industry it predicts present annual consumption of 35,000 tonnes will increase to 50,000 tonnes by 1990 and as much as 65,000 tonnes by 2000. Thus an extra 130,000 to 170,000 tonnes will be required between now and 1996 for which no contracts have yet been signed. It predicts Australia could double its exports by 1996 by providing one third of this extra requirement.

The Slayter Report is therefore not merely a scientific report but involves a determination of issues in the field of international relations and international law.

A private report of a committee chaired by Dr. Kenneth Suter was released at about the same time. Its main conclusions concerning Australia's role in the nuclear cycle takes a diametrically opposed position to those of the Slayter Report.

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