

**Letter to SA Liberal MPs Feb2020 FoE**

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We are writing to recommend an urgent rethink of the SA Government's positioning regarding the proposed National Radioactive Waste Management Facility (NRWMF) near Kimba, for the following reasons:

**1. It is unconscionable for the SA Government to be supporting a facility that is unanimously opposed by the Barngarla Traditional Owners.**

The federal government excluded Barngarla Traditional Owners from the 'community ballot' held last year and even went so far as to contest a court case initiated by Traditional Owners regarding their exclusion.

The Barngarla Determination Aboriginal Corporation initiated a separate, confidential postal ballot, conducted by Australian Election Company. This resulted in 100% of respondents voting 'no' to the proposed nuclear facility. Not one Barngarla Traditional Owner supported the nuclear facility.

The Barngarla Determination Aboriginal Corporation (BDAC) wrote to the Federal Government stating:

*"This unanimous "No" vote demonstrates that there is absolutely no support at all within the Barngarla community for the NRWMF. BDAC has requested that given the first people for the area unanimously have voted against the proposed facility that the Minister should immediately determine that there is not broad community support for the project. In light of this total rejection of the NRWMF by the Barngarla people, it is BDAC's responsibility to continue to give voice to the profound concerns Barngarla traditional owners have regarding the NRWMF, and to take whatever steps are necessary to oppose the NRWMF being located on Barngarla Country."*

The SA Labor Party argues that traditional owners should have a right of veto over nuclear projects given the sad and sorry history of the nuclear industry in SA, stretching back to the British atomic bomb tests. Deputy Leader of the Opposition Susan Close says that SA Labor is "utterly opposed" to the "appalling" process which led to the recent announcement regarding the Kimba site. Compare that to the Federal Government, whose mind-set seems not to have advanced from the 'Aboriginal natives shall not be counted' clause in the Constitution Act 1900. As Barngarla Traditional Owner Jeanne Miller says, Aboriginal people with no voting power are put back 50 years, "again classed as flora and fauna."

The SA Government should support Barngarla Traditional Owners in their current struggle.

To do otherwise would be unconscionable and would inevitably result in a strong, sustained negative reaction from South Australian citizens and voters for years to come.

To support the nuclear facility despite the unanimous opposition of Barngarla Traditional Owners would be to drag South Australia back into the 18th century.

## **2. Kimba is a community divided**

Former federal resources minister Matt Canavan previously said in Parliament that 65% support would meet the Government's requirement for 'broad community support'. Ironically, he qualified that statement by noting that other factors would need to be taken into account including the views of traditional owners. In 2016, the Department's Principal Advisor Bruce Wilson said the Minister would need "at least that [65%], if not more" before proceeding with a siting decision.

But only 54.8% of eligible voters supported the proposed nuclear facility in the Kimba ballot held last year, well short of the 65% benchmark. If the results of the Barngarla ballot are combined with the government-initiated ballot, the overall level of support falls to just 43.8% of eligible voters (452/824 for the Kimba ballot, and 0/209 for the Barngarla ballot).

Kimba and Eyre Peninsula residents opposed to the proposed nuclear facility are determined to keep fighting. Barngarla Traditional Owners are determined to keep fighting. Environmentalists, trade unions, medical and public health groups, church and faith groups, and many other South Australians are determined to keep fighting.

Only 4% of South Australia is arable land. It is of deep concern that a nuclear waste facility in the area could be allowed to jeopardise the agricultural industry. Indeed the proposal to site a nuclear waste repository and store in Kimba is a clear breach of the National Health and Medical Research Council's *Code of Practice for Near-Surface Disposal of Radioactive Waste in Australia*, which states that "*the site for the facility should be located in a region which has no known significant natural resources, including potentially valuable mineral deposits, and which has little or no potential for agriculture or outdoor recreational use*".

The Federal Government's claim that 45 jobs will be created is a cruel hoax. It is wildly inconsistent with comparable facilities overseas.<sup>1</sup> It assumes that Australian workers are at least 10 times less productive than workers at comparable facilities overseas.<sup>2</sup> Successive Federal Governments have claimed there would be zero, six or 15 jobs. Then the number magically tripled last year to 45 jobs – just as the \$10 million bribe was tripled to \$30 million.

## **3. This is a statewide issue that will not go away**

South Australians have greater ambitions for our state than to be someone else's nuclear waste dump. This has been proven time and time again:

- In 2004, after a six-year battle, the Howard government abandoned plans for a national nuclear waste dump near Woomera.
- In 2016, the plan to import intermediate- and high-level nuclear waste from around the world was abandoned in the face of public and political opposition.

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<sup>1</sup> The Australia Institute, 2018, 'Down in the dumps, Economics of a national radioactive waste management facility', <https://tinyurl.com/svvrroj>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=19959&page=0>

- Last year, the Federal Government abandoned plans for a national nuclear waste facility near Hawker in the Flinders Ranges in the face of fierce opposition from the local community including Adnyamathanha Traditional Owners.

Each of those successful campaigns began from a standing start. Momentum was built and sustained until the proposal was abandoned. Momentum will continue to build until the Federal Government abandons its latest proposal to establish a national nuclear waste dump and store in SA. Surely it would be in the best interests, and is the responsibility of, the SA Liberal Government to support South Australians rather than falling in line behind the Federal Government.

A March 2015 survey commissioned by the *Advertiser* found just 15.7% support for a nuclear waste dump. A 2018 poll found just 35% support for a 'national nuclear and radioactive waste dump in outback SA' and 55% opposition. Those strongly opposed to a nuclear and radioactive waste dump in the 2018 poll outnumbered those strongly in support by a factor of three (41:14).

#### **4. Long-lived intermediate level waste would be stored in SA *ad infinitum***

The Federal Government repeatedly refers to a facility for 'low-level waste'. Yet the Government itself has acknowledged that, measured by volume, 30% of the waste is long-lived intermediate-level waste (LLILW). Measured by radioactivity – a far more important criterion than volume – well over 90% of the waste is LLILW.

This LLILW is destined for 'interim' above-ground storage at Kimba pending the establishment of a deep underground repository somewhere else. No site has been found for deep underground disposal of the LLILW. Indeed the Government has not even begun a site selection process, nor does it have any plans to initiate a site selection process. Overseas experience is not promising. Countless plans for deep underground nuclear waste repositories have been abandoned, sometimes after the expenditure of many millions or in some cases billions of dollars. The only operating deep underground disposal site in the world – the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico – was closed for three years after a chemical explosion in February 2014, with costs amounting to approx. A\$3 billion.

The claim that LLILW would be removed from 'interim' storage at Kimba after around 30 years is implausible and deceitful. The federal regulator ARPANSA has repeatedly noted that the LLILW could be stored above-ground "for more than a century"<sup>3</sup> – but no such acknowledgement has ever been made by the Federal Government.

LLILW would remain stored above ground in SA *ad infinitum* – a clearly unacceptable situation. An overwhelming majority of the LLILW is currently stored at the Lucas Heights site, 30 kms south of Sydney, operated by the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). There is no reason to move LLILW from Lucas Heights for storage in SA. Australia's nuclear expertise is concentrated at Lucas Heights – not in Kimba. Security at ANSTO's facility is vastly superior than would apply at a store in Kimba. According to Matt Canavan, 93% of the (low-and intermediate-level) waste destined for a nuclear waste 'facility' is currently stored at Lucas Heights.

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<sup>3</sup> See section 4 in the submission posted at [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/foe/pages/199/attachments/original/1497932543/FoE\\_ACF\\_CCSA\\_submission\\_Kimba\\_June\\_2017-final.pdf](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/foe/pages/199/attachments/original/1497932543/FoE_ACF_CCSA_submission_Kimba_June_2017-final.pdf)

South Australia's Nuclear Waste Facility (Prohibition) Act 2000 – an initiative of the Olsen Liberal Government – was legislated specifically to prevent the imposition of intermediate-level nuclear waste facilities. The Marshall Liberal Government should honour that legacy and use all available legal and political initiatives to put a stop to the absurd proposal to move LLILW from above-ground storage at Lucas Heights to above-ground storage at Kimba.

## **Conclusion**

South Australians are greatly indebted to Steven Marshall, Rob Lucas and other Liberal Party members for your strong role in putting an end to the ill-considered scheme to turn SA into the world's high-level nuclear waste dump. We are indebted to you for continuing the transition to a low-carbon, renewable energy-based energy sector in SA.

We would enthusiastically welcome a repositioning regarding Canberra's latest plan to dump nuclear waste in SA.

The Federal Government may have the legal power to impose a nuclear waste facility, but history has repeatedly shown that a sustained, concerted campaign can and will succeed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Green', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jim Green