HOT POLITICS

testing times

Yellowcake (uranium oxide)

A Friends of the Earth feature on Nuclear Issues in Australia
The nuclear industry has always generated heat with atomic true believers and passionate opponents clashing over the impacts of uranium mining, the real costs of nuclear power, the dangers of radioactive waste and the ever-present threat of nuclear weapons.

In contemporary Australia the concerns raised by this polluting industry are finding voice in a new generation of activists and community organisers. Committed to a peaceful and nuclear free future they are mobilising to stop the dream of splitting the atom by a few meaning divided communities, health risks and contaminated country for the many.

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The nuclear story begins with uranium. This radioactive mineral is the basic fuel for both nuclear power and nuclear weapons and Australia has plenty of it - about one third of the world’s reserves. The debate over uranium mining has been one of the longest running public struggles with over three decades of opposition and community action.

Uranium mining and milling is a risky and polluting process that threatens the health of workers, local communities and the surrounding environment. It takes a naturally occurring hazard that has effectively been in a geological cocoon and concentrates this in a powered form that can move through wind and water. It interrupts the flow and reduces the quality of ground and surface waters at the mine site and releases gases that can cause cancer and other diseases. It also creates large amounts of a long-lived radioactive waste product known as tailings. These routinely contain around 80% of the radioactivity of the original uranium ore and are difficult to control and isolate. They pose a direct threat to humans and the wider environment for many thousands of years.

Uranium mining first began in South Australia in the 1940’s as part of the British nuclear weapons program during World War 2. After the war mining continued throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s in both SA and the South Alligator region of the Northern Territory.

In the 1970’s there was a major expansion of the scale and impacts of the industry when mining was approved at Nabarlek and Ranger in the NT’s Kakadu/West Arnhem region. This radioactive waste continues to seep through the surrounding environment. It takes a few thousand years to be eliminated from the surface environment and becomes a long-term radioactive contamination of the soil and the water. It interrupts the food chain and isolates. They pose a direct threat to humans and the wider environment for many thousands of years.

In the 1980’s the attention of both miners and anti-nuclear protestors swung south with the development of WMC’s massive Roxby/Olympic Dam mine about 80 kilometres from Woomera in northern South Australia. Environmentalists joined the Kokatha people, the areas traditional Aboriginal owners, to oppose the development of the world’s largest uranium deposit. In 1983 and 1984 large direct actions at the site focussed national attention onto Roxby’s impacts but political and corporate manoeuvring carried the day over environmental and human rights concerns and the mine opened in 1988.

The years of the Hawke-Keating ALP governments (1983-1996) were characterised by an uneasy standoff in the uranium debate. Labor acknowledged the deep community feeling against uranium mining but was reluctant to move against the industry. The resulting ALP policy allowed for mining at existing sites but refused to approve new ones. The uranium mining companies routinely tried to get this position overturned at ALP national conferences but pressure from anti-nuclear groups helped keep the brakes on any expansion and when operations at Nabarlek ceased in 1988 Australia had only two operating mines, Ranger and Roxby.

In 1996 the election of the strongly pro-nuclear Coalition government dramatically changed this political landscape. A push for increased uranium mining in Australia saw industry commentators speculating on over 20 new mines, with the first new application at Jabiluka in Kakadu coming from Energy Resources of Australia (ERA).

The cast of the Jabiluka campaign highlights the difference in perspective and access to power that can be seen throughout the history of the uranium issue. Supporters of the planned new mine included the conservative federal and NT governments, the mining industry and many mainstream media and business commentators. Those mobilising in the defence of Kakadu included the region’s Mirarr traditional Aboriginal owners, indigenous solidarity groups, other political parties and a broad church of environment, anti-nuclear, faith, trade union and peace activists.

The Jabiluka campaign saw a rich tapestry of action and activity that covered many different fields. Opponents of the mine took legal action, ran national speaking tours and produced waves of materials including...
the story of the Mirarr’s struggle is still no proven and assured way of becoming nuclear waste. The combined transport accidents. The combined

sufferance opposition and create an\r\n
2015. These tests included a series of nuclear weapon detonations along with hundreds of so-called “minor trials”. These minor trials aimed to cover key aspects of nuclear weapons design, operations and safety, and included such activities as incoerating vehicles carrying radioactive material to simulate transport accidents. The combined bomb tests and trials left a legacy of displaced Aboriginal communities, sick service personnel and contaminated land that continues today.

Another legacy from the time of the bomb tests is the culture of secrecy, denial and ill-defined “national interest” that still permeates many nuclear activities.

The Australian Atomic Energy Commission (AAEC) was formed as part of a technology and skills transfer deal with Britain in 1953 and by the end of that decade was well advanced with the development of the HIFAR (High Flux Australian Reactor) nuclear reactor in Sydney that was to be the centrepiece of nuclear research for the next four decades. The AAEC was given authority – and exemptions from public scrutiny – under the federal Atomic Energy Act, legislation that also had stiff penalties for opponents to the development of nuclear power and science.

Not content with a nuclear research reactor the AAEC and some of the state electricity agencies also actively lobbied for nuclear power. Detailed assessment and design and preliminary construction work for nuclear power reactors occurred at Jervis Bay on the NSW coast and on French Island in Victoria’s Westport Bay. Financial constraints, community opposition, political considerations and Australia’s abundance of economically inexpensive coal combined to ensure that these reactors saw life only on the drawing-board.
A detailed Senate Inquiry into the reactor found that the federal government had failed to develop a clear and compelling case for the reactor and was deeply critical of the actions of both the government and ANSTO. Highlighting the organisation’s continuing obsession with secrecy, the Senate report described ANSTO as having “a culture of secrecy so embedded that it has lost sight of its responsibility to be accountable”. A NSW Inquiry into the plan and the radioactive wastes generated by a new reactor found there was an urgent need for further review, a “compelling” case for alternatives to the reactor and urgent deferring any operating license for the new reactor.

The main reason put forward in defence of the reactor plan is that it is required to provide a reliable source of radioisotopes for use in nuclear medicine – a claim described as a “dated and emotive argument” by the Medical Association for the Prevention of War, MAPW, a leading national medical organisation with extensive international links and expertise has done detailed research that demonstrates Australia can have world-leading nuclear medicine care without a reactor. The case for the new reactor has been further undermined by the increased security risk posed by nuclear facilities in the current global political climate, the discovery of a significant seismic fault line directly under the reactor site, serious construction irregularities, questions over the competence and track record of INVAP, the reactors Argentine designer, rising project costs and the absence of a proven and credible means to manage the existing and future radioactive wastes arising from ANSTO’s operations. Despite these concerns the federal government has remained fixed on completing the new reactor and the increasingly discredited project is now moving from the construction to the final licensing phase.

Sydney is our largest city and no place for a nuclear reactor. Fifty-five years after opening our country to the last of the nuclear damage of nuclear weapons testing the lesson has not been learnt – radiation and secrecy is a very dangerous mix and the ambitions of a small technical and political clique should never be confused with good public policy.

The nuclear industry began before there were clear plans on how to best handle the long-lived wastes that resulted from its operation, and after six decades not much has changed. There are no high level radioactive waste disposal facilities operating anywhere around the globe, waste stockpiles continue to grow as community confidence in the industry erodes and there is no proven and assured way to isolate radioactive waste from people and the environment for the periods of time needed before it stops being a direct and deadly threat.

Nuclear waste is hot and hazardous and has been described by the UN’s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as “the most perplexing topic in nuclear technology today”. The nuclear industry’s inability to openly and effectively deal with the waste it creates and to instead unreasonably impose a toxic legacy on all future generations is its greatest ethical and practical failure and a powerful constraint on future industry growth.

Spent fuel and other waste from ANSTO’s nuclear reactor accounts for the majority of the total radioactive waste in Australia and is currently stored at the Lucas Heights site in Sydney, or in either Britain or France awaiting return to Australia following reprocessing. Other radioactive waste is currently stored at different sites around Australia, generally in federal and state storage facilities.

Small amounts of waste are also held by hospitals, industry and research institutions.

In July 2004 community pressure forced the federal government to formally abandon its long held aim to impose a national radioactive waste dump for low-level and short-lived intermediate level radioactive wastes at a site near Woomera in South Australia.

This move followed a decision by the full bench of the Federal Court that the government’s use of urgent compulsory acquisition powers was not justified and a sustained community campaign against the dump plan by the regions Aboriginal custodians, especially the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta, environment groups and the wider SA community and Government.

The decision also followed a visit to South Australia by Prime Minister Howard during which the dump issue was identified as a significant liability to the Coalition’s chances of retaining three key marginal seats in metropolitan Adelaide. The dump plan was seen as so deeply unpopular that shortly before the 2004 election the federal government moved to limit any adverse political impact by declaring that no facility would be located on the mainland, with Environment Minister Campbell declaring that the governments “preferred and only option” for radioactive waste was a dumpsite on a yet to be named Australian island. In a deeply cynical move since the federal election the government has moved away from this commitment and is once again actively exploring a mainland dump option.

ANSTO is Australia’s major producer and holder of radioactive waste and a move opposed by the NSW government, local residents and groups including FoE, ACIF and Greenpeace.

The current policy uncertainty around this issue means that the federal government has no proven, credible or agreed way to manage radioactive waste. This is a particular concern given that federal radioactive waste constitutes over 90% of Australia’s total waste volume. In January 2006, in a move aimed at side-stepping regulatory pre-conditions over waste as part of an operating license for the new reactor, a deal was announced that would see reactor spent fuel waste shipped to the US for storage. This move, while politically convenient for supporters of the new reactor, fails to effectively address Australia’s growing radioactive waste problem.

Dr John Loy, the head of ARPNASA, has stated that any operating license would be conditional on ANSTO having a “clear and definite” way of managing the resulting wastes and that this would need to be “written in blood”. However since this statement was made this position has softened, the regulatory hurdle has been lowered and it is far more likely medium. Despite this, the issue of radioactive waste management remains closely linked to the reactor licensing process and is set to remain an issue of significant community and political awareness, concern and action in Australia.

In spite of all the promises, the money and the decades of research and reassurances there is no simple or proven way to manage and effectively isolate radioactive wastes. There is no place for imposed, secretive and polluting nuclear facilities in a sustainable Australia and the society that continues to produce growing volumes of a toxic product it cannot manage is a society that has forgotten its duty of care not only to this generation but to all who follow.
1975 was a year of profound change in Australia, including in the remote South Australian desert. In June a Western Mining Corporation (WMC) exploration team hit storable reserves of both copper and uranium near a dam on a pastoral property called Roxby Downs. The dam had been built in 1956 against the frenzied backdrop of the Melbourne Olympics, now two decades later it was the geologists who were in a frenzy and the story of the controversial Olympic Dam / Roxby uranium mine had begun.

The period from discovery of the orebody in 1975 to the formal announcement that the project would proceed in 1985 was a decade of intense political manoeuvring, backroom deals, corporate evaluations and positioning, public debate, protest action, blockades and deep community and indigenous concern and opposition.

From the start national anti-nuclear groups joined with the region’s traditional Kokatha Aboriginal owners in actively opposing the mine. Relations with WMC, then led by the abrasive uber right-opposing the mine. Relations with WMC, Kokatha Aboriginal owners in actively and opposition.

In November 1988 the mine was formally opened and the years since have vindicated the early critics of the project would proceed in 1985 to the formal announcement of the controversial Olympic Dam / Roxby uranium mine had begun.

Despite its toxic track record WMC is currently considering a massive expansion of the mine and its uranium holdings are seen as a key leverage point in the continuing corporate battle for control of the company and the world’s largest uranium deposit.

If approved and implemented the planned $4.7-8 billion expansion would see the mine become the world’s largest copper-uranium mine producing around 600,000 tonnes of copper and up to 15,000 tonnes of uranium each year. This would place far greater pressure on water and energy resources needed for the mine and greatly increase the production of radioactive wastes.

The mine footprint, first seen three decades ago, is a growing threat to the long-term health and integrity of the environment of the both the Roxby region and those places around the world where its poisonous product is used, stored and dumped.

FoE is continuing to work with other groups to highlight the impacts and oppose the planned Roxby expansion and to clearly advocate a path for the company and the world’s largest uranium deposit.

A licensing process will involve two rounds of public submissions and a public forum in Sydney. ANSTO plans to undergo “cold commissioning” of the new reactor – a series of performance and safety tests without uranium fuel – in the second half of 2005 and hopes to begin full operation of the reactor in early 2006 when the obsolete smaller reactor at the site would also be shut down.

A key condition for granting a reactor operating licence is that firm radioactive waste management plans must be in place. No such plans exist. In July 2004 the federal government abandoned its plan for a nuclear waste dump for lower-level wastes in South Australia and there is no plan to deal with higher-level wastes, including wastes arising from the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel rods.

ARPNASA CEO John Loy said he would need to see “significant progress” on waste management plans before issuing a reactor operating licence. Given the failure of the federal government and ANSTO to realise this pre-condition the licence application should be rejected.

ANSTO continues to falsely claim that a new reactor is required to produce medical radioisotopes, despite the fact that there was no evidence of disrupted supply when the existing reactor was shutdown for seven weeks in early 2004. ANSTO’s claims linking the reactor to medical isotopes were described as “exaggerated and emotive” by the Medical Association for the Prevention of War.

MAPW representative Associate Professor Lou Irving has described the new reactor as unnecessary, declaring that “instead of building a dangerous new nuclear reactor in the growth suburbs of Australia’s biggest city, we can use a mixture of imports, non-reactor isotope production, nuclear technology and advanced new technologies.” Further detail on this issue is contained in the excellent report, ‘A New Clear Direction: Securing Nuclear Medicine for the Next Generation’, available on the MAPW website.

A new nuclear reactor is simply unnecessary and with an adequately funded research and development program into non-reactor isotope production methods such as electrical cyclotrons there would be little or no need for reliance on imported isotopes. There are clear alternatives – what is missing is clear thinking on the part of the federal government.

The real reasons the government wants a new reactor is a combination of ‘national interest’ or foreign policy issues and to satisfy ANSTO’s own organisational agenda. In particular the government wants to maintain a team of nuclear-trained experts to maintain the nuclear/military alliance with the United States. Aside from the fact that Australia’s reliance on the US nuclear umbrella is highly problematic it is also
Veteran anti nuke activist Benny Zable opposing the new nuclear reactor in Sydney.

While they’re not planning to close their dangerous, polluting reactors or to begin dealing responsibly with their legacy of toxic radioactive wastes they do profess deep concern about climate change and argue that nuclear power is the only ‘solution’.

Proponents of nuclear power downplay or fully ignore the many problems that would be exacerbated by an expansion of nuclear power globally or the introduction of nuclear power into Australia, including:

- **NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROLIFERATION** - civil nuclear facilities can be used in various ways for weapons production and weapons-related research. There are many examples of each of these problems. ‘Peaceful’ nuclear facilities have been used in covert weapons programs in well over 20 countries, including Australia.

- **SECURITY** - more nuclear reactors mean more nuclear materials and this means more chance of nuclear weapons proliferation or “dirty bomb” development by nation states or other groups.

- **SAFETY** - in addition to the perennial problems of plant malfunction, routine radiation releases and human error, terrorism looms large as a threat to nuclear plants and everyone working and living in their vicinity.

- **COST** - nuclear power is highly centralised and very capital intensive. It is ill suited to meet growing global energy needs, especially in developing nations.

- **RADIOACTIVE WASTE** - despite six decades of assurances and research there is still no proven or assured way to safely isolate hot and highly toxic nuclear wastes from people or the wider environment for the time periods necessary.

Nuclear power is impractical as a ‘solution’ to climate change. A report released by the European Commission in 2000 found that 85 nuclear power reactors would need to be built in Europe over the next 20 years just to meet Europe’s modest Kyoto targets. Many more reactors would need to be built in order to replace fossil fuel fired power plants in moving further towards the 60% reductions required to stabilise atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases.

**SILEX delivering nuclear weapons capability?**

In 2004 Greenpeace revealed that a secretive company named Silex has been researching and developing the laser enrichment of uranium at ANSTO’s Lucas Heights nuclear site in Sydney.

The technology Silex is developing can be used to enrich uranium, silicon and carbon. Compared to other methods of uranium enrichment Silex has significant commercial advantages with lower capital costs and power consumption. This also means that Silex could be a cheap, easy and undelected way to access nuclear materials.

The Silex uranium enrichment technology is ‘dual use’ technology and can also be used to produce materials for use in nuclear weapons. Silex are the only company in the world pursuing laser enrichment and the danger is that this technology could also be used to make nuclear weapons production simpler and more attainable. The company claims their technology will only be used to create fuel for power reactors, however this assurance is beyond their capacity or control.

The Australian government’s support for the development of dual use nuclear technology undermines its commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. Increasing the range of pathways that can lead to nuclear weapons is not in the long-term interests of Australia or the world.
US Senator George Mitchell in his 1991 book ‘World on Fire’ outlined that “for nuclear power to offset even 5% of global carbon emissions would require that worldwide nuclear capacity be nearly doubled from today’s level. That means that nuclear is simply not a medium term option for slowing global warming.”

Construction and licensing of a single nuclear power plant takes over a decade and more years would pass before it became a net energy producer — producing more energy than was consumed during its construction. A single nuclear power reactor costs several billion dollars and this money would be much more effectively spent on energy conservation and efficiency measures and promoting renewable energy sources.

In Australia building nuclear power plants would not only be irresponsible and impractical as a means of addressing climate change, it would also be illegal. The construction of nuclear power plants was made illegal in the 1998 Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act.

If a government attempted to push ahead with construction of a nuclear power reactor public opposition would be immense. Any push for a domestic nuclear power plant would meet very strong resistance. An earlier proposal to build a nuclear power plant in Australia at Jervis Bay on the NSW coast in the late 1960s, was defeated by public and political opposition and this experience would be likely to be repeated.

Claims that nuclear power is ‘greenhouse free’ are nonsense. Substantial greenhouse gas generation occurs across the nuclear fuel cycle from the mining, conversion and enrichment of uranium; the construction and decommissioning of power reactors; extensive transportation of nuclear materials and waste management, including reprocessing and disposal.

Fossil fuels do produce more greenhouse gas emissions than nuclear power but it is not an ‘either-or’ question. You do not solve one environmental problem by embracing another one. Renewable energy sources however do provide a viable and real solution as they typically generate 4-5 times less greenhouse gases per unit of energy than nuclear power. Importantly, they also do not produce long-lived and highly dangerous wastes, nor are they linked to the production of weapons of mass destruction.

Nuclear power is not the silver bullet for tackling greenhouse pollution and climate. The real solution to this serious threat is improved energy efficiency and increased use of renewable energy sources.

According to the Critical Mass Energy Project every dollar invested in energy efficiency is up to seven times more effective in reducing carbon dioxide emissions than nuclear power. In 1995 in a detailed review the British government concluded that nuclear power is one of the least cost-effective ways to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The Australian government recently hosted an OECD conference on eco-efficiency covering a range of areas such as housing, manufacturing and agriculture. The conference concluded that in every area, efficiencies of between a factor of two to four could be achieved in the short term using existing technologies.

The extent to which renewable energy sources - such as wind, solar, geothermal and bio-mass - can replace fossil fuels and nuclear power depends to a significant extent on investment in research and development programs and on the support given to bring such research into commercial application and use.

A University of Technology (Sydney) Institute for Sustainable Futures 2003 report showed that the Howard government provides fossil fuel industries with $9 billion of subsidies annually. At the same time the government is actively undermining important funding to key centres for sustainable power.

Such policy moves are in direct conflict with the approach we need to be taking to address the real and growing issue of climate change.

The nuclear industry has consistently failed to deliver on its promises and assurances. Nuclear power is not cheap, clean or safe. The latest, and last, hope of this failing trade is to manufacture the myth of nuclear as the answer to the climate change problem. The future for a clean and sustainable planet lies not in desperately embracing flawed and polluting nuclear technology but instead moving towards improved energy efficiency and a growing role for genuine renewable power sources such as wind and solar power.

Nuking the climate is not the change we need to make.

The problem of Australia’s nuclear waste has generated significant debate, media attention and political division over the past decade.

Friends of the Earth Australia maintains that a credible plan for the storage of nuclear waste must involve an open and transparent process, community consent and a genuine desire to achieve the best environmental outcome rather than simply a political result.

Given this, any credible national radioactive waste management strategy should be separated from the current push for a new nuclear reactor and should instead be informed by a dedicated independent Inquiry based on the principles of international best practice, waste minimisation and the non-imposition of radioactive waste transport or storage.

FoE believes the following basic principles should form the basis of any national radioactive waste strategy:

- No more nuclear waste
- Effective monitoring
- Safe storage
- Radiation lessons in Australia
- Australia needs a nuclear waste strategy
Nuclear weapons: the "ultimate" weapon of mass destruction

No other weapon has the destructive power of modern day nuclear weapons. Even with the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons remain a serious threat to human security and exert a powerful hold over international security positioning and human relations.

**TODAYS NUKES**
The average destructive force of a nuclear weapon today is between 8–40 times the power of those weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that killed around 210,000 people in 1945.

The threat of a new generation of nuclear weapons, announced recently by both Russia and the USA, increases the risks of nuclear weapons being used in conflict. Some military planners believe that the single use of a smaller-yield nuclear weapon would not create the same devastation as an older style weapon and so might be more prepared to use these new weapons. If one was used the impacts would still be monumental on the target area and beyond and the threshold for future nuclear use would be lowered.

No one wins a nuclear war and we must never allow the use of nuclear weapons to be seen as a reasonable option.

There is also an increasing awareness of the potential destruction of “dirty bombs” from radioactive materials such as spent fuel rods or nuclear waste. While many terrorist or other groups may find it difficult to access weapons-grade plutonium and the missile delivery systems needed to launch an attack, there are still nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

**NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT**
The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is the cornerstone of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. The NPT basically states that those who have nuclear weapons will progressively get rid of them and those who do not have them will never get them. This treaty came into force in 1970 and is signed by all but four of the world’s nations the exceptions being India, Pakistan, Israel and now North Korea.

The threat of nuclear destruction began 60 years ago when the first nuclear weapons were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It must stop now. With large numbers of nuclear weapons still in existence and some nuclear capable nations undermining nuclear disarmament agreements, the NPT’s promise of “total and unequivocal nuclear disarmament” remains a vital goal for the world community.

In the current hype on the “War on Terror” we must continue to hold our own government accountable for its role in accepting that the possession of nuclear weapons can be in any way legitimate or acceptable.

The prevalence of LoW or hair-trigger alert thinking in US and Soviet/Russian nuclear war planning has meant, and still means, that launch control officers and national Presidents may have only minutes to decide whether or not to end the world. In the case of nuclear rivals India and Pakistan nuclear weapons are also being increasingly kept in a state ready for immediate launch and the extent of nuclear firepower remains far in excess of that required to initiate an immensely destructive nuclear winter.

There have been a significant number of nuclear close-calls. The most famous, and possibly the most terrifying, took place on September 26 1983 and the world’s improbable saviour was one Colonel Stanislav Petrov.

Colonel Petrov was an IT specialist who knew the weaknesses of the then state-of-the-art Soviet satellite early warning system. When that system mistook a peculiar configuration of bright sunlight glinting off unusual high cloud formations over North Dakota for a US missile launch Petrov’s standing orders required that he press a button that would launch over 10,000 warheads at the US and its allies.

Acting on a gut feeling that it was a glitch, Petrov defied the regulations. The profound importance of this decision was finally recognised in May 2004 when he was awarded the World Citizens Award for saving the world.

Peace Activist Saves the World – it might sound like a comic book headline but with thousands of nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert it is more fact than fiction.

Since the 1960s the USA and Soviet/Russia have maintained large numbers of nuclear-armed missiles in “launch-on-warning” (LoW) status. This is done because any missiles fired from one country to another take about half-an-hour to reach their targets and the target country aims to launch its missiles before they get hit.

FoE has previously played an important international role in convening nuclear weapons work, including a global campaign to take strategic nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert over the period of the Y2K ‘clock’ that gained support in both the Australian Senate and the European Parliament.

The current appeal for an end to LoW status has already been signed by over 20 Nobel prize winners including the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Joseph Rotblat and Archbishop Bello and the call is supported by a broad group of more than 200 organisations and politicians such as the Association of World Citizens, Greenpeace, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and the International Federation of the Red Cross.

The US has also had its share of nuclear near misses including one case in 1980 where missiles were readied for launch and the Presidential ‘doomsday plane’ took off because ‘thousands’ of Soviet warheads appeared on NORAD computer warning screens – an error finally attributed to a faulty computer chip in a Colorado switching station.

Lowering the operating status of nuclear weapons is recognised globally as a first step towards nuclear disarmament and working for a widely supported United Nations General Assembly (UNAGA) resolution on the operating status of nuclear weapon systems is a key part of FoE’s nuclear weapons campaign.

In 1955 a Norwegian weather rocket sent to research the Aurorae Boraeis was mistaken for a submarine-launched US first strike aimed at vaporizing the Kremlin. The signal this time went to the nuclear briefed case of a blind-drunk and seriously altered statesman, Boris Yeltsin.

Yeltsin’s panic-stricken aides decided to wait an additional minute beyond the procedural deadline for sending the go-codes. In that additional minute the weather research rocket plunged into the Arctic Ocean.

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By far the greatest single danger facing human-kind, in fact all living beings on our planet, is the threat of nuclear destruction...

The 1960s saw the birth of the nuclear industry. Photo: ACF

FoE’s campaign will increase throughout 2005 with a focus on the UN’s nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review conference in May and the following sessions of the UN General Assembly.

This is an issue of vital importance that needs all the help it can get – in a nuclear war we are all losers and we need to act to make sure this never happens. As Stanislav Petrov has shown, the actions of an individual can literally make a world of difference.
NUCLEAR FREeways
local resistance to nuclear waste transport

An industry that is as dangerous and unsustainable as the nuclear one is difficult to sell. Each time the nuclear industry has tried to set up shop in Australia it has been met with fierce resistance from communities across the country concerned over the risks, the wastes and the radiation it generates.

A recent example of effective community resistance can be seen in the campaign to stop the transport of nuclear waste from Sydney to a proposed dumpsite near Woomera in South Australia. The planned 1700 km route crossed the spectacular World Heritage listed Blue Mountains and passed through prime agricultural land, western New South Wales properties and towns and the mining community of Broken Hill before heading into South Australia. Its route also cut across a diverse cross-section of contemporary Australia. Residents of suburban Sydney, farmers, citrus growers, doctors, emergency service personnel, tour operators, miners, townfolk, councillors and local business people all became involved. Despite their diverse political persuasions they were all united in one cause - no nuclear free.

were key concerns presented by communities to a NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the issue in 2004 in which people across NSW demanded to be part of a decision that directly affected their lives.

Friends of the Earth started travelling the transport route in 1999. Our Nuclear FreeWays (NFW) campaign centred around informing communities of the federal plan and generating action on the community level. On our first visit we found that none of these communities had even heard that the federal government planned to truck nuclear waste through their streets and homes. This was despite the fact that the route included main streets and travelled past schools and farms and along stretches of roads that locals knew to be unsafe for such dangerous cargo.

Despite repeated representations to the federal government from local and state government members the only response that the community had was from paid government consultants who told them that if an accident did occur then all that would be required to clean up was “a spade and wheelbarrow”. This government indifference was further highlighted when the Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed nuclear dump had no detailed assessment of the impacts of an accident on the transport corridor.

By 2004 thousands of local people had signed petitions and over 20 local councils, the NSW local government association, state and federal government members from both sides of the politics, emergency services unions, the Country Women’s Association and Field Naturalists had all expressed their opposition to the federal plan. Community concern was also indicated by the key finding of a NSW Parliamentary Inquiry that the federal nuclear waste plan could not be justified and should be abandoned – a recommendation that became a reality in July 2004.

The NFW’s campaign is a recent and clear example of the strength of community action. Although the nuclear industry may at times appear an unstoppable giant there are living examples both here and overseas that show it can be halted by the persistent resistance of people acting collectively to keep our communities clean, safe and nuclear free.

Indigenous people in Australia and overseas continue to be deeply affected by the impacts of the nuclear industry and to carry a disproportionate burden of its toxic legacy. Nuclear weapons tests, exploration and mining of uranium and nuclear dumping have – and continue to – take place on traditional lands. These actions have serious and negative impacts on the environment, health and cultural practice of Indigenous people.

From its earliest days Aboriginal communities have been a pivotal part of the Australian anti-nuclear movement and a powerful voice in defence of clean country and strong culture. Aboriginal people have led key campaigns to halt the further development of the industry and to obtain justice and redress for those who have suffered from its operations.

Many communities are facing increasing pressure to approve nuclear developments on their lands. These demands are becoming more complex and, if approved, mean future generations will inherit long-term problems. Against this pressure Aboriginal communities across the country continue to stand strong for and are working to stop nuclear and uranium projects on their land.

Indigenous and environmental groups have many common interests and mutual concerns over the impacts of nuclear projects and a history of respectful co-operation and effective joint campaigning to oppose an industry with a long history of poisoned people and contaminated country.

One of the most high profile recent Indigenous struggles against the nuclear industry has been the work of the senior Aboriginal woman of northern South Australia in defending their country from a planned federal nuclear waste dump. Their story is one of courage and determination and is a powerful example to all.
THE ALLIANCE AGAINST URANIUM

One specific initiative developed between Aboriginal and environment groups is the Alliance against Uranium (AaU) – a network formed in 1997 in response to a growing push for increased uranium mining in Australia. The Alliance grew out of Aboriginal concern over the impacts of existing and proposed uranium mines. We don’t want uranium from our country to be used to hurt other peoples. The Aboriginal experience with uranium mining continues to result in genocide of our community and destruction of our homelands and country.

We share concerns about the local, national and international impacts of present and proposed uranium mines. We don’t want uranium from our country to be used to hurt other peoples. The Aboriginal experience with uranium mining continues to result in genocide of our community and destruction of our homelands and country.

Our future depends on all our cultures remaining strong. Our cultural values cannot be traded for money. Our country and the law and power and cultural values have been recognized by the High Court.

We call on all Australians to recognize and affirm these Native Title obligations to protect country and culture now and for the future. Together we have developed a timetable for action to oppose uranium mining and export at all levels, and to actively work towards reducing all forms of nuclear threat.

Excerpt From Alliance Against Uranium Foundation Statement April 1997

JABILUKA

Another high profile and active anti-nuclear campaign has been the move to end plans for a new uranium mine at Jabiluka in Kakadu. The Mirarr people, the traditional owners of the region, have led a massive effort here and overseas to protect their land and life. While the threat of mining at Jabiluka is not over it has been greatly reduced, and the Mirarr and their many allies are winning a vital struggle.

"Uranium! It’s the opposite of the mother creator, the opposite of the mother’s milk that gives life. This uranium is another substance – a mineral that takes life. It pollutes the rivers, the country – everything."

Uncle Kevin Buzzacott – Arabunna activist

MIRARR STATEMENT

The Mirarr people still say no to Jabiluka mine! All the Mirarr are together: we are united against any more uranium mining on Mirarr country. No amount of money, no amount of political pressure, no backroom deals, no bribery or blackmail will make us change our mind. We cannot change the law and the law is that we protect our sacred sites.

Since 1996, the Mirarr have fought against Jabiluka across Australia and overseas. We have won many friends and our supporters are strong and stand with us. We have travelled a long road. We have been to many meetings in many different places. We will continue to resist more mining on Mirarr country. We have no choice – this is our land and our life, we can never leave, we must protect it.

Yvonne Margarula – senior Traditional Owner of the Anangu, April 2002

We showed that Greenies and Anangu can work together. Greenies could come and live here in Coober Pedy and work together to stop the dump. Kungkas showed the Greenies about the country and the culture.

‘People said that you can’t win against the Government. Just a few women. We just kept talking and telling them to get their ears out of their pockets and listen. We never said we were going to give up. Government has big money to buy their way out but we never gave up. We told Howard you should look after us, not try and kill us. Straight out. We always talk straight out. In the end he didn’t have the power, we kept talking and telling them. Just a few women. We just didn’t have money, but money doesn’t win.

We were crying for the little ones and the ones still coming. With all the help we have no choice – this is our land and our life, we can never leave more mining on Mirarr country. No amount of money, no amount of political pressure, no backroom deals, no bribery or blackmail will make us change our mind. We cannot change the law and the law is that we protect our sacred sites.

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There is unfinished business regarding the British nuclear weapons testing program in Australia in the 1950s and early 1960s. Along with a series of “minor trials”, three major nuclear detonations were conducted at the Monte Bello Islands off the coast of Western Australia and nine further tests were carried out in South Australia – two at Emu Field and seven at Maralinga.

These nuclear tests negatively affected thousands of people and the impact on Indigenous peoples was particularly profound. Permission was never sought for the tests and permission was never given to authorised Aboriginal sites.

In the 1990s the Australian government carried out a further ‘clean up’ of the Maralinga site. The ‘clean up’ was botched, and kilograms of plutonium remain buried in shallow, untrenched trenches in totally unsuitable geology. The nuclear engineer, Maralinga insider and ‘whistle blower’ Alan Parkinson described the Maralinga work as “a cheap and nasty solution that wouldn’t be adopted on white-fellas land.”

Promoters of the nuclear industry like to portray the horrors of the nuclear tests as yesterday’s business but the problems persist, as does the culture that allowed the testing to occur. Governments still cut corners and promote the nuclear industry in Australia. Our political leaders continue to portray the horrors of the nuclear test and it is increasingly clear that large areas of Australia were also contaminated by the tests.

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Nuclear radiation – gamma rays or electron beams – in order to sterilise them and prolong shelf-life. Highly radioactive materials such as Cobalt 60 or Caesium 137, a nuclear industry waste product, are used to expose foods or other products to high levels of ionising radiation.

Despite an earlier moratorium on food irradiation in Australia in the early 1990’s the federal governments current reluctance to make labelling mandatory means that this technology is now sneaking its way into homes and onto plates across Australia – without the knowledge or consent of consumers.

Food irradiation has not been proven safe and in key trials it does not appear to work effectively. Problems persist around issues of “safe” dosage levels and the effects on foods of different levels. Scientific studies since the 1950s have revealed harmful effects from consuming irradiated food including DNA damage, cancer and residual radioactivity. In addition the quality of the food suffers with decreased vitamin and nutritional content.

Because irradiated foods have not been proven safe for human health there is a clear need for conspicuous and comprehensive labels for all irradiated foods. Consumers should be able to easily determine if their food has been irradiated. Labels should also be required for irradiated ingredients of compound foods and for restaurant and institutional foods.

To compound the problem Free Trade Agreements with other countries, especially the USA, could open the floodgates for imports of products including irradiated food.

In 1999 local residents first discovered Steritech Pty Ltd’s plan to build a nuclear irradiation facility in the Narangba Industrial Estate, north of Brisbane. Surrounded by residential suburbs, this plant could be the first in Australia to irradiate food on a large scale. The Stop Food Irradiation Alliance ran a highly visible campaign against the plant but, despite its anti-nuclear policy, the Beattie Government allowed Steritech to open its doors in 2003.

Since this time a national Food Irradiation Alliance has formed to push for improved labelling laws and greater community awareness and to fight any future developments including another proposed facility in Cairns. You are what you eat – and the human stomach is no place for the by-products of a polluting industry.
HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE. SUPPORT FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

Dear FoE,
I want to lend a hand to help Friends of the Earth’s work for a nuclear free future. I do not support polluting uranium mines or nuclear waste dumps, reactors or weapons – but I’m happy to support your anti-nuclear actions and education work. I understand my membership or donation will contribute to Friends of the Earth remaining active on these and other issues.

You make the difference

Join Friends of the Earth

community  ecology  solidarity  justice

Please return to
Friends of the Earth
PO Box 222 Fitzroy 3065
Cheques payable to ‘Friends of the Earth’

Name
Address
PostCode

Phone

Active Friends

Yes, I would like to make a monthly donation of:
☐ $20 per month
☐ $30 per month
☐ $50 per month
☐ other $_____ ($10 min) per month

The donation will be:
☐ By direct debit from my bank account (this has the least admin fees!) - please fill in ‘Direct Debit Details’ below
☐ By going to www.egive.org.au - please return this form as well
☐ By credit card - please fill in ‘Credit Card Details’ at the bottom of this form

If you would also like to become a member, tick here: ☐ $20 per financial year of your active friends contribution will go towards membership, this is not tax deductible.

Direct Debit Details

I/We __________________________ __________________________

(Family name)

Request you, until further notice in writing, to debit my/our account described in the schedule below, any amounts which Friends of the Earth Inc may debit or charge me/us through our direct debit system. I/We understand and acknowledge that:
1. The bank/financial institution may in its absolute discretion determine the order priority of payment by it of any moneys pursuant to this Request or any authority or mandate.
2. The bank/financial institution may in its discretion at any time by notice in writing to me/us terminate this Request to future debits.

The schedule (Please print clearly)

Financial Institution
Branch Address
Name on Account

BSB Number
Account Number
Your Signature

OR become a FoE member with a yearly membership payment:
☐ New Member
☐ Renewal

☐ $120 Supporting Member ($60 tax deductible)
☐ $50 Waged Person
☐ $60 Household
☐ $90 Organisation
☐ $30 Low Income
☐ One year ☐ ___ years ☐ Ongoing (credit card only)

OR make a one-off donation

Donation $_______ (thank you)

Donations over $200 are tax deductible

☐ Please send me information on FoE’s bequest program

Credit Card Details

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Bankcard

Card Number: __________________________

Card Expiry Date: __ __ / __ __

Cardholders Signature: __________________________

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