



Top 10 reasons to oppose uranium mining

Uranium mining in Australia poses a threat to our society, our environment and our region. Nuclear power is not clean, nor is it safe. Renewed interest in uranium mining has been driven by an unsustainable increase in uranium prices and does not offer any solution to climate change.

Pressure is being put on the Queensland government to open the state up for uranium mining. Though the Queensland Labor Party currently has a policy opposing uranium mining in Queensland, uranium exploration is taking place, in particular in the Mt. Isa and Townsville regions.



1. Uranium mining threatens our environment, especially water

Uranium mining is a water intensive industry, as is nuclear power. The Olympic Dam uranium mine in South

Australia uses up to 42,000,000 litres of water per day in its operations. (The average per capita Australian use is 1,000,000 litres per year.) After its use in uranium mining, the contaminated water is left radioactive and unusable.

Uranium mines and their tailings remain dangerous well after closure. The 2006 federal budget allocated \$7m for the ongoing clean up of contamination from mines in the NT that were closed in the 1960s.

In April 2006, residents of the Burdekin region, south west of Townsville, were offered subsidised rain water tanks when their drinking water was found to have higher than acceptable uranium levels. The region is downstream from the Ben Lomond uranium deposit.

Keep Queensland water safe - don't mine uranium



2. Uranium mining & nuclear power threaten worker and community health

Mine workers are exposed to ionising radiation from uranium. Surrounding communities can also be affected by radiation through water leakages, contaminated vehicles and contact with tailings ponds.

Accidents do happen. In March 2004, 150 workers at the Ranger mine (NT) were exposed to drinking water containing uranium levels 400 times greater than Australian standards. Mining company ERA was fined \$150,000- the long-term impact on the workers' health is as yet unknown.

The meltdown at Chernobyl in 1986 was not an anomaly; it was one of many cases of human and/or technological failure in the nuclear power industry. An overview of worldwide nuclear accidents, "Let the Facts Speak: An Indictment of the Nuclear Industry", is available on the internet: www.rachelsiewert.org.au/files/releases/let-the-facts-speak-3rd-edition.pdf

The long-term effects of radiation contamination from that one disaster are yet to be known. Sheep farmers as far away as in Scotland and Wales must still monitor all their stock for radioactive caesium levels due to fallout from the Chernobyl meltdown.

Once released into the environment, there is no way to retrieve leaked radioactive material



3. Uranium mining & nuclear power create radioactive waste

Uranium mines create millions of litres of radioactive waste in the form of mine tailings. Nuclear power creates high level radioactive waste. There are approximately 250,000 tonnes of high level nuclear waste stockpiled around the world.

The Federal Government is now attempting to impose a waste dump on the NT, despite promising not to do so in the last election. Both expanding uranium exports and opening an enrichment industry will increase pressure on Australia to import overseas waste.

No safe, long-term disposal site for nuclear waste exists anywhere.



4. Uranium mining & nuclear power are linked to weapons proliferation

All existing and proposed reactor types (including breeders, thorium, fusion etc) risk contributing to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Supposedly "peaceful" nuclear facilities and materials can be - and have been - used in various ways for weapons production. In fact, of the 60 countries which have built nuclear (power or research) reactors, over 20 are known to have used their 'peaceful' nuclear facilities for covert weapons research and/or production. It is widely acknowledged that the safeguards system monitoring uranium flow and weapons production is flawed.

Even if we only sold our uranium for use in nuclear power plants, doing so allows countries such as US and China to use their domestic reserves for weapons.



5. Mining and enrichment threaten regional security

Processing or enrichment will increase the social, political and environmental costs of the nuclear industry in Australia. The federal government is currently attempting to present enrichment as a means to ensure that Australian uranium is sold only for nuclear power. In fact, as is the case with Iran, an Australian enrichment industry will fuel regional fear that Australia is developing weapons capability, or is supportive of weapon's production.

Processing and enrichment will also create further radioactive waste, including U-238 or "Depleted Uranium" requiring long-term storage. DU, which has a half-life of 4.5 billion years, is now commonly used in US and UK weapons.

Regional security will not be served by a nuclear industry in Australia.



6. Nuclear power will not stop climate change

Climate change is happening now – a 60% reduction in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions is needed by 2050. Nuclear energy is used almost exclusively for electricity generation, which is responsible for

only 30% of global GHG emissions. A doubling of nuclear power by the middle of the century would require 1000 new reactors and reduce greenhouse emissions by only 5%.

Uranium is not a renewable resource. In fact, at current rates high grade, low-cost ore will be exhausted in 50 years. Expanding production will simply exhaust that supply even earlier.

Long term energy solutions, energy efficiency measures and commitment to reduction of GHG emissions in transport, agriculture and other industries are the only way to address climate change.



7. Numerous alternatives to nuclear power exist.

Renewable energy, mostly hydroelectricity, already supplies 19% of world electricity, compared to nuclear's 16%. Wind power and solar power are growing by 20-30%

every year. In 2004, renewable energy added nearly three times as much net generating capacity as nuclear.

Sweden already gets 48% of its electricity from renewables and expects 60% by 2010. It is phasing out its nuclear reactors by 2020. Many other countries and regions are setting renewable energy targets. China's target is 15% by 2020 - three times more than its nuclear aspirations (5%).

Australia doesn't need nuclear power. Clean energy scenarios based on existing energy infrastructure have been produced and are ready for implementation. Energy diversification is key; nuclear power has no role to play. Australian and Queensland Clean Energy models can be found at: www.wwf.org.au/publications/clean_energy_future_report/

Australian companies are leaders in the global renewable energy market.

Wind: "Roaring 40s," a partnership between Hydro Tasmania and China Light and Power, made a deal in 2005 to build \$1.5 billion worth of wind generation.

Solar: According to a report released by the Business Council for Sustainable Energy, "sales of Australian-made solar PV increased 33 per cent to \$267 million, contributing \$140 million in export earnings."

Biofuels: Recently EnvoSmart Technologies (The Netherlands) and Ozmotech (Australia) secured a A\$190M deal to transform unsorted plastic waste into high quality green diesel that complies with International and European Standards.



8. Uranium does not and will not contribute significantly to our economy

Nuclear power provides just 16% of the world's electricity, and this is projected to decrease (12% As it is, uranium is not a major export dollar earner.

Australian uranium exports in 2005 accounted for less than one third of one percent of Australia's total export revenue, or \$573 million. Even a doubling or trebling in exports will not make a big impact on the economy.

Queenslanders, in particular, must question why the Federal Government is pushing the uranium market. In 2003-4, sugar exports earned \$1,029 million, over three-times uranium's export value for that year.

All of the major operating uranium mining companies, BHP (UK – Olympic Dam) and Rio Tinto (UK – Ranger), and General Atomics (USA –Beverly), are multinational corporations. These companies do not invest their resources into developing or maintaining our local economies.



9. Uranium mining violates indigenous human rights

Australian Aboriginal opposition to uranium mining has been well documented since the release of the Fox Inquiry in the 1980's. Unfortunately, lack

of infrastructure and investment in remote areas, has allowed mining companies to pressure indigenous communities to permit mining on their sacred lands, in exchange for basic services like school and hospitals. Royalties are often an enticement in areas where poverty and lack of services prevail due government neglect. These conflicts can cause rifts in the community.

No community should be forced to have a uranium mine or waste dump to ensure their basic rights to health, education and a future for their children.



10. The majority of Australians oppose uranium mining

Polling conducted by Newspoll in May 2006 showed 66% supported a position of either 'no uranium mines' or 'no new uranium mines in Australia'.

The same poll showed that 78% of ALP voters supported this position. Community concerns over and opposition to uranium mining and wider nuclear developments remain high and there is no net gain, or community support, for Queensland facilitating this industry.

The environmental, social and economic facts stand against uranium mining. Let all Australians stand there too, for today and all future generations.



Friends of the Earth

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