



Australian uranium and nuclear weapons

As the uranium debate heats up, there is growing concern about the possibility that Australian uranium could be used to promote nuclear weapons proliferation.

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Consecutive federal governments have claimed that Australian uranium is earmarked only to be used in “peaceful” nuclear technology, such as nuclear power.

In fact, there is no way to guarantee that Australian uranium is not used in weapons, and it is likely that Australian uranium directly or indirectly supports weapons production.

Here’s why:

- 1) The existing safeguards regimen is grossly flawed and inadequate.
- 2) There is a strong link between “peaceful” nuclear power and research programs and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.
- 3) Australia uranium exports helps free up uranium reserves in importing countries for military purposes.

Safeguards

Australia’s bilateral safeguards have been slowly whittled away since the 70’s and have become virtually meaningless. Furthermore, internationally, not only are the “safeguards” difficult to enforce, there are many loopholes to their efficacy.

Australia’s “safeguards” now allow for:

- Australian uranium to be sold from offshore warehouses outside Australian jurisdiction (pacific solution!!!)

- A system of “equivalence” that means Australian uranium could be used in unauthorised ways, provided that an equivalent amount of uranium was used in approved activities. ‘Flag swaps’ or ‘book transfers’, by which Australian originating uranium could become American or French or some other nationality to save transport costs. Thus, an amount of French uranium held in the US for enrichment could have Australia safeguards attached to it, while an equivalent amount of Australian uranium in France lost its Australian identity, thus obviating the necessity of shipping the original Australian uranium in France to the US. (Broinowski)

It is with these terms that Howard has made his 1 billion dollar sale to China. Government documents acknowledge that the Chinese regime need not subject a single ounce of Australian uranium to safeguards inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and can freely

use it to produce nuclear weapons. The agreement establishes that at some, unspecified part of the nuclear fuel cycle, an equivalent amount of nuclear material is subject to safeguards.

Furthermore, “Uranium conversion facilities are before the “starting point” for IAEA safeguards procedures and are not included in IAEA safeguards agreements with nuclear weapon states.”

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The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose role is to promote “peaceful” uses of nuclear technology, and the only international organisation set up to monitor nuclear development, admits the safeguards system has problems.

IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed El Baradei recently complained that the safeguards system operates on a “shoestring budget... comparable to a local police department” and has stated that basic inspection rights are “fairly limited”.

Did you know?
Australian uranium has already been used in nuclear weapons. Uranium from Rum Jungle (NT) and Mary Kathleen (QLD) was used in British nuclear weapons tested at Maralinga, South Australia.

“Peaceful” nuclear programs support weapons manufacture

Supposedly “peaceful” nuclear facilities and materials can be - and have been used in various ways for weapons production, including the production or diversion of fissile material (especially highly enriched uranium and plutonium), production of radionuclides other

than plutonium for use in weapons, e.g. tritium which is used to boost nuclear weapons, dual-use (civilian and military) and nuclear weapons-related research and more.

Concentrated Uranium 238 which is left as radioactive waste from uranium enrichment for reactors is now regularly used in weapons. Euphemistically called “Depleted Uranium”, this radioactive and toxic heavy metal is acknowledged to be commonly used in US and



UK armour piercing weapons systems.

In fact, of the 60 countries which have build nuclear (power or research) reactors, over 20, are known to have used their 'peaceful' nuclear facilities for covert weapons research and/or production. In some cases the R& D was small-scale and short-lived, but in other cases nation states have succeeded in producing nuclear weapons under cover of a peaceful nuclear program - India, Pakistan, Israel, South Africa and possibly North Korea.

The Australian story

Since 1990, Australia's own national research reactor at Lucas Heights, promoted as a medical research reactor, has been commercial leased by Silex Systems Ltd. to experiment in uranium enrichment. In May 2006, Silex signed an agreement to share this dual-use technology with US-based giant General Electric, the world's largest company and a leading nuclear and military contractor.

The 'peaceful' nuclear power and research sectors have produced enough fissile material to build about 160,000 nuclear weapons, with 1,600 tonnes of plutonium from power reactors accounting for a large majority of the total. If 99% of this plutonium is indefinitely guarded against military use, the remaining 1% would suffice to produce 1,600 nuclear weapons, each with a yield similar to the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the US in World War Two.

Civil nuclear programs also support nuclear weapons programs in the five "declared" weapons states, the US, Russian, the UK, France, and China. In particular, civil programs provide pools of expertise from which military programs draw. It is no coincidence that the five declared weapons states account for almost 60% of global nuclear power output.

Australian uranium exports frees up reserves for weapons development

Whether directly used in weapons or not, Australia uranium exports free up uranium reserves in the importing country for other purposes. The current number one purchaser of Australian uranium is the United States, the country with the world's largest active nuclear arsenal.

If Howard's uranium deal with China goes ahead, Australia will be supplying uranium to three of the four most prolific nuclear weapons manufacturing states: The US, China and France. Both the United States and China have local uranium deposits and mines, that could be fuelling their nuclear power industries if required. China has admitted that they do not have enough material to fuel both their weapons and power industries. Therefore, uranium exports to China will support China's weapons industry even if it is exclusively used in power production. Howard has also been considering uranium deals with India and Pakistan.

Some nuclear industry supporters claim that Australian could improve safeguards by enriching uranium, leasing nuclear materials to overseas clients and having the waste returned to Australia.

This "Cradle to Grave approach" would still allow countries to use their own uranium (or other) for weapons production and would open Australia up to be the world's dumping grounds for radioactive waste.

Global Nuclear Weapons Stockpiles

There are currently about 30,000 nuclear warheads in the world today. Of these about 13,000 are deployed and **4,600 of these are on high alert**, ie. ready to be launched in minutes.

The combined explosive yield of these weapons is approximately 5,000 megatons, which is about 200,000 times the explosive yield of the bomb used on Hiroshima.

State Nuclear Stockpile

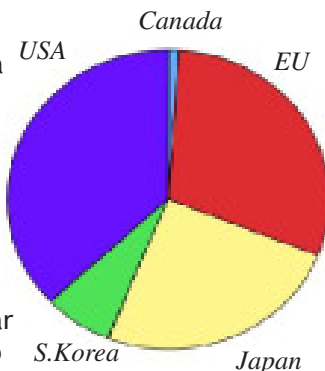
Russia	16, 800
United States	10, 600
China	410
France	350
United Kingdom	200
Israel	100
India	70s
Pakistan	44



Note: There are sometimes variances in numbers cited for stockpiles due to uncertainties of the status of some weapons, i.e. whether they are deployed, in non-active reserve, or dismantled. *Nuclear Age Peace Foundation*

Australian Uranium Exports 2004-5

In the five years to mid 2005, Australia exported 46,000 tonnes of uranium with a value of over A\$2.1b. The greatest percentage of Australian uranium went to nuclear superpower, USA to weapons production.



Uranium InformationCentre



The only safe way to ensure that Australian uranium does not support weapons production is to leave uranium in the ground.



Nuclear Free Queensland is an initiative of The Queensland Nuclear Free Alliance, The Queensland Conservation Council and Friends of the Earth Brisbane and made possible by the Beyond Nuclear Initiative



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