

## **Policy Statement on the Mining and Use of Uranium Nature Conservation Council of NSW**

### **March 1984 The Nature Conservation Council Of New South Wales**

The Council, formed in 1955, is an affiliation of seventy-seven scientific, conservation and environment groups throughout NSW. Its policies are determined at Annual Conference attended by delegates from member societies and implemented by an elected and appointed Executive and its sub-committees.

### **History Of Council Policies On Uranium**

At its Annual Conference in 1974, the Council called on the Australian Government to refuse to export uranium to those countries engaged in researching or manufacturing nuclear weapons or generating power by fission or reactors. The Council also urged the Government to adopt a policy of using within Australia (and of exporting) only uranium which was to be used in physical and bio-medical research.

At its Annual Conference in 1977 the Council extended its uranium policy by adopting a resolution condemning the mining and export of uranium and its consequences out of concern for the resultant general effects on:

- the proliferation of nuclear weapons;
- radioactive contamination of air, water, soil and living matter;
- toxic waste contamination;
- lessening employment;
- inhibiting energy conservation;
- inhibiting research towards a sustainable energy economy.

The 1977 policy of the Council also recognised that nuclear power does not meet the needs of third world countries and that paying for it will lead to further impoverishment of those countries.

Further, the policy recognised the specific site effects that uranium mining would have on the wilderness qualities and biota of the proposed Kakadu National Park, and on the cultural heritage of the Aboriginal people of the Alligator River Region.

The Council's 1977 Conference also criticised the Federal Government's failure to adopt many recommendations of the Ranger Uranium Environment Inquiry.

In 1978, the Council's Annual Conference committed full support to the Northern Land Council in its efforts to obtain maximum environmental protection in accordance with the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry Second Report recommendations.

The 1978 Conference again condemned the Federal Government for its failure to accept many of the recommendations of the Ranger Inquiry. The Conference also opposed any uranium mining within the boundaries of Kakadu National Park.

In 1980, Council's Annual Conference endorsed article 20/4 f of the World Conservation Strategy which relates to the need for a much more rapid progress on world disarmament.

The 1981 Conference considered that the action of the Federal Coalition Government, in setting aside the provisions of the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act and forcing the Koongarra Project Area Bill (1981) through Parliament, was "one of the most adverse conservation decisions of our time".

The Council abhorred the total disregard of the Government for one of the recommendations of the Fox Inquiry, i.e., no approval for Koongarra.

#### **Council's 1984 Special Conference On Uranium**

Late in 1983, faced with the prospect of both a hastily arranged Inquiry into uranium conducted by the Australian Science and Technology Council and an alternative inquiry established by a number of community groups, the Council convened a Special Conference, under the terms of its Constitution, to discuss the question of uranium mining and its consequences. The Special Conference, held on 19th February, 1984, re-affirmed Council's general policy statement condemning the mining and export of uranium adopted at the 1977 Annual Conference.

The 1984 Special Conference then made a further policy statement on uranium in the terms of the following resolution:

*Out of concern for the effects of nuclear war and the nuclear fuel cycle on all life on earth, and indeed the earth itself, the Nature Conservation Council -*

*opposes:*

- a) *the mining and export of uranium, thorium and other nuclear fuels; the development and use of power stations fuelled by nuclear materials, uranium enrichment plants, or any other part of the nuclear fuel cycle;*

b) *the manufacture, stockpile, deployment or use of nuclear weapons)the carriage of nuclear weapons and materials via Australian land, air space or territorial waters:*

*supports:*

- a) *taking strong economic and diplomatic action in all available international forums to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons;*
- b) *(b)the declaration of a nuclear- free Pacific and the exclusion of nuclear weapons from Australia;*
- c) *(c)increasing efforts to conserve energy;*
- d) *(d)the use of renewable energy alternatives to both nuclear tear and fossil fuels;*
- e) *(e)the development of alternatives to the use of radioactive materials for physical, biological biochemical and medical research, diagnosis and treatment: urges: the Australian Government to adopt policies to achieve these aims.*

### **Background To The Resolution**

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW has traditionally been concerned with what might be termed 'micro-conservation' issues: decisions with regard to land use, preservation of flora and fauna, use of water, rainforests, pollution, etc. The 'macro-conservation' issues, such as economic growth, global pollution and population, have largely been outside the direct concern of the Council.

Some opinion in the traditional nature conservation movement has felt that conservation organisations such as the Council should not become involved in the issue of the use of uranium for the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

However, the results of the use of nuclear weapons in war would be so catastrophic on all life - man and the biota - and on the physical environment of the earth itself, that conservationists cannot fail to consider the implications of the results of nuclear war. Indeed, it could be said that all traditional environmental/conservation work of the past and present would have been carried out in absolute futility if society fails to prevent nuclear war.

Apart from the overwhelming threat and possibility of nuclear war, there are other major philosophic reasons why nature conservationists must express alarm at the implications of the mining and use of uranium.

The conservation philosophy is essentially concerned with thinking of and providing for future generations, not only of man, but of other forms of life as well. The word 'conservation' has been variously defined as 'the wise use of resources according to that which society decides it wants now and in

relation to that which it feels it should leave for the future', and, again, 'conservation is the effort to ensure to society the maximum present and future benefit from the use of natural resources'. The nature conservationist adds to these 'use-based' definitions the need to allow for the future existence and survival of all non-human forms of life on earth, as free as possible from the detrimental influence of man, and without necessarily being of any future 'use' to man. Philosophically, then, an overwhelming concern to many nature conservationists is the fact that this generation has no moral right to leave a legacy of environmental problems in the hope that they may be able to be solved by some future generation.

Science and technology have so far failed to offer this generation an acceptable solution to the disposal of long-lasting nuclear wastes. The fact that these wastes pose a threat, not only to man, but to other forms of life, for many times the known history of man on earth, is a philosophical stumbling block and hurdle not easily overcome by some of the glib suggestions of how this generation should 'dispose' of such wastes.

Apart from 'macro-conservation' and philosophical issues, many operations of the nuclear industry directly impinge on matters of immediate nature conservation interest - mining in national parks, stream pollution, disturbance of ecological communities and archaeological values, etc. On these matters, it is clearly both proper and necessary for the Council to speak out strongly.

The resolution adopted at the 1984 Special Conference of the Council has three distinct sections:

- opposition: to the mining and export of uranium, use of nuclear power stations, and manufacture, carriage or use of nuclear weapons;
- support: for development of alternatives to nuclear medicine and energy and support for energy conservation;
- support: for action by the Australian Government to adopt policies which will seek, at the international level, to further the interests of nuclear disarmament and a nuclear-free Pacific.

The Council, in opposing the mining and use of uranium, is fully aware of the need to research and develop alternatives to nuclear energy and to initiate broad-scale energy conservation programs.

In respect of the research and medical use of uranium, the Council recognises that there exist today important and valid uses of radioactive materials in biological and medical research, diagnosis and therapy. It believes that current stockpiles of uranium and thorium are sufficient to meet the needs of these uses. However, the extent of these stockpiles should not be allowed to inhibit the need for, or delay, the development of alternatives to the use of radioactive materials for these purposes.

In calling for action by the Australian Government, the Council believes that Australia should not only adopt strong non-nuclear policies within its own national boundaries, but should do its utmost in the international scene to exert a strong moral pressure on other nations. This should logically concentrate, in the first instance, on the Pacific zone.

The Council rejects the viewpoint that Australia's non-participation in international nuclear trade would prejudice its ability to exert international influence.

The arrogant disregard by the French Government of the wishes of the peoples living in the Pacific as reflected by their continued nuclear activities at Mururoa is one that can only be deplored.

### **Conclusion**

The Nature Conservation Council has for many years expressed opposition to the nuclear industry in many different ways.

It believes that every thinking Australian should view the continuance of the nuclear industry, with all its implications, with the utmost horror and alarm.

The Council calls upon the Australian Government to renounce the nuclear option, and to use the moral example of so doing as a lever in the international sphere to advance the prospects of both peace for mankind and survival of all forms of life on earth,

The Council believes that the ultimate issue is the threat posed to man, other forms of life on earth, and the earth's physical environment itself, by both the catastrophic destruction of nuclear war and the more subtle but none-the-less ongoing problem posed by toxic nuclear wastes and radioactivity.

C.H. PRATTEN

**CHAIRPERSON  
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