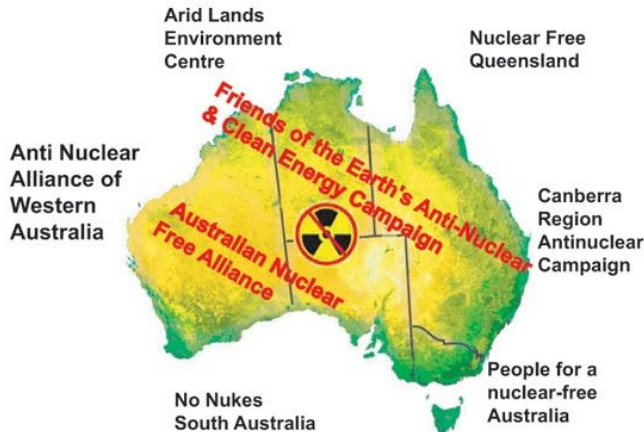


Australia sleepwalks towards a dangerous nuclear future

By Dr Helen Caldicott

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An informed democracy will behave in a responsible fashion, says [Dr Helen Caldicott](#), however as we sleepwalk towards embracing nuclear energy, most Australians are not aware of the dangers and have forgotten the history.

THE [Australian anti-nuclear movement](#) started in Adelaide in 1971 when fallout from French atmospheric nuclear tests polluted Adelaide's water supply.

People were warned that [strontium 90](#) concentrating in milk would further concentrate in childrens' teeth and bones and years later could cause leukemia or bone cancer.

Australians, in general, were not enamoured of the French and were so incensed that they were polluting the southern hemisphere with their tests that a huge movement erupted. Spontaneous marches occurred in Adelaide streets, people stopped buying French wine and cheese, postal workers refused to deliver French mail and whole pages were devoted to

indignant letters to the editor.

Within nine months 75 per cent of Australians fervently opposed the tests.

I then travelled to Paris with Deputy Prime Minister [Jim Cairns](#) and Ken Newcomb of the [Australian Union of Students](#) to inform the French Government of our opposition. Australia and New Zealand took France [to the International Court of Justice](#) and they were forced to test underground.

Despite this international victory, three years later Whitlam decided to mine and export uranium. I knew nothing about medical hazards of nuclear power until I read [Poisoned Power](#) by Gofman and Tamplin, who had been commissioned by the U.S. [Atomic Energy Commission](#) to research the dangers of nuclear power. I then travelled to Canberra to warn Whitlam of the medical dangers of the enterprise, but to no avail.

A group began in Adelaide called [Campaign Against Nuclear Energy](#) (CANE) and in Melbourne, [Movement Against Uranium Mining](#) (MAUM). Unions learned of the dangers and became so deeply concerned that, when a man refused to shunt a truck containing yellow cake in Brisbane, the Australian Railways Union called a 24-hour nationwide strike.

The medical dangers of uranium and nuclear power hit the headlines.

Finally, in 1978, the ACTU passed a resolution to ban uranium mining, transport and export, which lasted for five years until Bob Hawke introduced the [Three mine policy](#), ending the ban.

The anti-nuclear movement in Australia was very powerful and prevailed for many years.

Ironically, an ardently pro-nuclear group in Adelaide has arisen, led partly by Barry Brook – a professor of climate change at Adelaide University – who is an adamant supporter of uranium mining and nuclear power in Australia and is promoting [small modular reactors](#).

To make matters worse, former Prime Minister Bob Hawke is advocating that Australia enrich uranium and [become the repository](#) for the world's nuclear waste.

Says Hawke:

“We would get an enormous stable flow of income which could be used for the benefit of the world and our own benefit.”

Nuclear waste [must be isolated](#) from the environment for one million years, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency — a scientific impossibility. These people clearly do not understand the carcinogenic and medical dangers arising at all stages of the nuclear fuel chain, nor do they understand radiobiology, genetics or [teratology](#).

Furthermore, nuclear power does not alleviate global warming, because it is supported by a massive industrial infrastructure, creating large quantities of global warming gases including CO₂ and CFCs. It is hugely expensive – \$12-15 billion per new reactor – and, unable to gain funding from Wall Street, is hugely subsidised by the Government.

And, most importantly, investment in nuclear power would [take money away](#) from desperately needed renewable energy.

Each large reactor contains as much radiation as 1,000 Hiroshima bombs and uranium becomes one billion times more radioactive in a reactor, creating 200 new dangerous radioactive isotopes. Three major nuclear accidents – [Three Mile Island](#), [Chernobyl](#) and [Fukushima](#) – all resulted from human fallibility. Chernobyl has [already killed over one million](#) and Fukushima, fueled by Australian uranium, will eventually kill thousands from cancer, leukemia, genetic disease and congenital malformations.

As President Jefferson [once said](#):

“An informed democracy will behave in a responsible fashion.”

Sadly the Australian people are now relatively uninformed about the medical hazards of the whole nuclear fuel chain.

Bob Hawke suggests Australia store nuclear waste <http://t.co/JRgVRFfZ3f>:

— Dave Donovan (@davrosz) [August 31, 2014](#)

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