Date: Monday 10th August 2015

Dear Commissioner Scarce,

Subject: ROYAL COMMISSION – OUR ROLE IN NUCLEAR ENERGY

I write to you on behalf of the Yankunytjatjara directors and members of the Yankunytjatjara Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (YNTAC) and as the current Chairperson. We are the Native Title holders of a region north of Coober Pedy and east of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands) with an area of 19,000 square kilometers and covering seven Pastoral Leases.

This Royal Commission that has now been operating for six months since the Premier’s announcement back in February 2015, is concerning many members of the Yankunytjatjara community because of our past – Maralinga in the 1950’s and 60’s – and we firmly say NO NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

As stated above, many of our members of Yankunytjatjara have experienced firsthand the impacts of Nuclear Energy and still continue to suffer from the immoral acts of people who are in powerful positions. Anangu people suffer on a day-to-day basis because of Maralinga Tests and what it has caused across our
people – death, sickness, loss of eyesight, cancers, infant mortality and other health complications. These are real issues that are still fresh and occurring in our communities and Anangu will talk up strongly about it.

Nuclear energy, nuclear weapons and nuclear waste are catastrophic and immoral in this day and age.

South Australia cannot turn a blind eye to its past, its history, it needs to pause, reflect and learn from it and understand the impact to the First Peoples of this State and this Nation. This Royal Commission is not only a debate for South Australia but for the whole of the Nation.

Anangu is the term used as ‘we people’, of the Western Desert Region including Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara.

Yankunytjatjara people are very concerned about;
1. the process of engagement
2. the level of information to the Anangu community
3. existing legislation
4. distrust of State sponsored activities
5. the safety issues
6. the health issues
7. the environmental issues

1. The process of engagement

Anangu and the wider South Australian Aboriginal Community are still playing ‘catch up’ six months into the Royal Commission. The Community Engagement Manager was an after thought and the position was filled in May three months after the Premier’s announcement. Engagement has been ad hoc across the State and Anangu are only hearing from the Royal Commission and have had limited opportunities to access information so as to reach an informed view.
2. The level of information to the Anangu Community

Anangu are only hearing one part of the story and, when using an interpreter, only hear what the presenter is presenting. These are very technical issues and it was raised back in March that any interpreters engaged in the process would need to have formal training and support in understanding the technical terminology. A team of Anangu interpreters and engagement specialists would be needed throughout the whole process of the Royal Commission to promote a safe environment for information sharing.

3. Existing legislation

The Royal Commission will be aware that South Australia has legislation in place to stop nuclear power stations and waste dumps. As such, the starting point for the Commission should be those protections already afforded to Aboriginal People by existing prohibition set by legislation.

4. Distrust of State sponsored activities

For a number of reasons, we have a distrust of State sponsored activities. We are concerned of the perception that this Royal Commission may be promoting nuclear industry and not identifying the real issues and concerns of Aboriginal People. We are similarly concerned with the political weight any outcomes of the Royal Commission may carry, particularly when we do not feel we are adequately represented in politics.

5. The safety issues

The State Government need to publicise how safety issues will be addressed by the Government, if any such activities were considered. For example, what mechanism will be in place, what guaranty or reassurance that it will not be community responsibility to clean up any spillage or contamination, or that
it won’t produce Nuclear Weapons? These questions must be sufficiently answered so we can give informed consent (or reasonably withhold informed consent) on any matters which carry such significant safety risks.

6. The health issues

We are concerned about the legitimacy of information on health issues relating to the nuclear industry. For example, where is the State Government getting this information from to educate the wider Anangu community about the impacts on our health? What mechanisms will be put into place after incidence of spillage or contamination to monitor Anangu health?

7. The environmental issues

Above all, we must fully understand what any nuclear industry activities will do to our environment, our plants and animal, the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the earth we live on. Given the international examples of the environmental issues for nuclear industries, including the nuclear bomb testings that have been conducted, there must be significant evidence of the damage that such industries create.

Conclusion

In closing we seek consideration of the opening comment that the Yankunytjatjara Native Title Aboriginal Corporation is against all parts of the nuclear fuel cycle in South Australia.

“We are the Aboriginal Women. Yankunytjatjara, Antikirinya and Kokatha. We know the country. The poison the Government is talking about will poison the land. We say, “No radioactive dump in our ngura – in our country.” It’s strictly poison, we don’t want it.”
“Never mind our country is the desert, that’s where we belong.”

Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta – Senior Aboriginal Women, Coober Pedy, SA.

Taken from the Talking Straight Out, Stories from the Irati Wanti Campaign.

Yours sincerely

Karina Lester
YNTAC Chairperson