

Submission for Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission Tentative Findings.

I have followed the Royal Commission at every stage and I applaud the open minded, comprehensive and rigorous way in which it has proceeded to this point.

I should like to address the section of the Tentative Findings titled SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONSENT.

The Royal Commission goes to great lengths to make it clear that “both social and community consent must be obtained...” and covers this aspect over some nine paragraphs.

My reading of the topic in the document leaves me feeling uncomfortable that there is no framework or definition around the word ‘consent’. In particular, I note that the word ‘consensus’ does not appear in the aforementioned section.

I attended the Adelaide Town Hall meeting in which Commissioner Scarce presented the Tentative Findings. The relatively small number of protesters were highly energised and in some cases hysterical. It was my observation that they were in the main driven by ill-informed and deeply entrenched dogma.

As retiring Federal MP Gary Grey said (on ABC TV), one day ago (March 17 2016), “Frequently the smallest number of people make the most of the noise.”

In the end, it will be the responsibility of elected parliamentary members both in South Australia and federally to enact any legislation that allows the establishment of a waste facility and, perhaps in the future, a nuclear fuelled power station.

Given the nature of political debate and in particular, the propensity of politicians of all stripes to be significantly influenced by media reports and polling, I submit that in its final report, the Royal Commission should make clear its definition of ‘consent’.

In science, there is rarely 100% certainty. Accepted science normally works on strong, peer reviewed consensus.

As Charles Darwin said, “Ignorance more frequently breeds confidence than does knowledge”.

I therefore urge the Royal Commission to acknowledge in its Final Report that 100% community consent will remain impossible to obtain so long as certain individuals or lobby groups refuse to become adequately informed of the issues and science yet remain noisy.

It would be most regrettable if South Australia, and especially its politicians, sinks into an infinite loop of arguing, unduly influenced by loud, emotional and ill-informed lobbyists.

Without courage, at least at the political level, the opportunity for South Australia identified by the Royal Commission will almost certainly be missed.

Gareth Davies
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