



## Australia's Submission to the United Nations Secretary-General's Report on Addressing the Legacy of Nuclear Weapons: Providing Victim Assistance and Environmental Remediation to Member States Affected by the Use or Testing of Nuclear Weapons

*RE: UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 78/240 / July 2024*

1. Australia welcomes the opportunity to make this submission on UNGA resolution 78/240 entitled 'Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to member states affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons'. Australia supported the resolution and commends the leadership of Kiribati and Kazakhstan on this issue.
2. Australia acknowledges the importance of the resolution in addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons testing in the context of UN First Committee. The Secretary-General's Report will provide an opportunity to build understanding among member states of the perspectives of countries affected by nuclear weapons testing, and to have a deeper conversation based on the evidence shared by affected countries. While a useful initiative at UNGA First Committee, we expect that member states will continue to discuss victim assistance and environmental remediation within the context of other regional and international forums. Australia also acknowledges the significant work on victim assistance and environmental remediation that has taken place bilaterally with affected states.
3. As a non-nuclear-weapon state, Australia is firmly committed to its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga).
4. As a country that has experienced the impact of nuclear weapons testing, Australia shares the concerns of member states, especially Pacific Island Forum Members, over the legacy of nuclear weapons testing. We continue to amplify Pacific voices on the issues that matter most to our region, including on nuclear non-proliferation.
5. Australia is willing to share our technical and scientific expertise in victim assistance and environmental remediation with other countries that have experienced nuclear weapons testing. We have the ability to conduct radiological analyses, using both field instrumentation for immediate feedback and detailed laboratory evaluations, to enhance the outcomes during assessments, remediation, and post-closure assurance, especially for long-lived radionuclide contamination.



### Nuclear Weapons Testing in Australia

6. From 1952 to 1963, the British Government, with the permission of the Australian (Commonwealth) Government, conducted a series of nuclear weapons development tests in Australia. Testing occurred at Maralinga and Emu Field in South Australia, and Montebello Islands in Western Australia. The tests included major trials described as detonation of nuclear explosive devices and minor trials which were investigating the performance of various components of a nuclear explosive device. Large areas of the former British nuclear test site at Maralinga were contaminated by the explosive dispersal of plutonium and other radionuclides.
7. In 1984, it was identified that there was a need for a comprehensive public account of the consequences of the British nuclear tests and 'minor trials' on Australians and their environment. It was announced that the Australian Government would establish a Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia on the conduct of the tests, health effects among Australian participants including First Nations peoples, and future management and use of the test sites. The remaining contamination at the site became the focus of the Royal Commission and formed a major element of the recommendations.
8. Environmental remediation of the Maralinga site took place between 1995 and 2000. Engagement with stakeholders, particularly the traditional owners, the Maralinga Tjarutja, through both the Technical Assessment Group (TAG) and the Maralinga Consultative Group (MCG), determined the specific criteria for rehabilitation including precautionary controls on land use activities. Since the Commonwealth Government's rehabilitation project in the 1990s, dose assessments undertaken every three years have shown contaminated soils are well within the clean-up standards for agreed and intended land use activities.
9. Australia recognises the devastating effects of nuclear testing and the long-lasting impacts on those affected. Australia also acknowledges the hurt and suffering caused by the removal of First Nations Australians from their traditional lands, and the impact this had on their traditions, lifestyle and connection to country.
10. Through the *2009 Maralinga Nuclear Test Site Handback Deed* (an agreement on the in-perpetuity responsibilities of the Commonwealth, South Australia Government and Maralinga Tjarutja), the Commonwealth is obligated to ensure Maralinga Lands remain safe for agreed and intended land use.
11. Under agreed terms in the Handback Deed, the Commonwealth provides funding to meet its ongoing obligations: monitoring and maintaining the ongoing health and safety of people and the environment on Maralinga Tjarutja Lands; economic development; and land rehabilitation costs in connection with contamination or hazardous materials on the land as a result of the British Nuclear Test Program.
12. Compensation for contamination of Maralinga Tjarutja Lands was also paid to the Maralinga Tjarutja traditional owners in 1994.
13. The Australian Government has provided the Veteran Gold Card, which covers clinically required treatment for all medical conditions, to eligible Australian participants in the British



Nuclear Tests program in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s (including certain civilians within the test areas). Australian Defence Force veterans with any condition related to their participation in the British Nuclear Tests program are also eligible for compensation under the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* and *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-Related Claims) Act 1988*.

14. Further information on the testing and remediation is available [online](#) at the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency's (ARPANSA) website.

### **Role of International Agencies**

15. Australia supports the active engagement of international agencies and organisations, consistent with their respective mandates, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Health Organisation (WHO) including on nuclear safety and achieving a permanent end to nuclear weapons testing.
16. Australia supports the critical role of the IAEA in assisting Member States to establish and apply a proper safety framework for the management of radioactive waste. Australia has full confidence in its independent, impartial, and science-based technical advice. Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) countries including Australia acknowledged the IAEA as the international authority on nuclear safety standards in February 2023, and in November 2023 emphasised the need to build national and regional scientific capacity and monitoring capabilities to assist the health and well-being of the marine ecosystems of the Blue Pacific including to human health within the region. ARPANSA has provided support to build scientific and monitoring capabilities in the Pacific through the IAEA Technical Cooperation Program.
17. The Australian Radioactive Waste Agency (ARWA), which is responsible for the management, safe storage and disposal of Australia's radioactive waste, is a member of the IAEA's Radioactive Waste Management and Technologies group (WATEC). ARWA's attendance at annual WATEC meetings demonstrates Australia's commitment to the international nuclear treaties regime administered by the IAEA, and nuclear stewardship from cradle to grave.

### **Australia's contribution to global efforts to end nuclear weapons testing**

18. A permanent end to nuclear-weapons testing is a critical element of addressing nuclear legacy issues. The Australian Government's commitment to the CTBT is unwavering. It is critical that the international community continue its efforts to universalise the CTBT and advocate for its entry into force to bring a permanent end to nuclear weapons testing. To date, 178 states have ratified the CTBT, including nine additional ratifications since 2021, which demonstrates the commitment of the international community to ending nuclear weapons testing permanently.



19. While the CTBT has not yet entered into force, as a strong supporter of its universalisation Australia co-chairs the biennial Friends of the CTBT Ministerial meeting with Japan and leads the annual United Nations General Assembly CTBT resolution with New Zealand and Mexico. Australia hosts the world's third-largest number of CTBT International Monitoring System (IMS) installations, 20 IMS stations and one analytical laboratory, helping to ensure that any nuclear test explosions are detected. Since 2019, Australia has supported the operation and maintenance of two IMS stations in Fiji and Kiribati. The IMS is a critical global public good, designed to detect any nuclear explosion worldwide as part of the verification regime of the CTBT. Australia supports the CTBT's International Data Centre (IDC) by providing training and continuous improvement aimed at the operation of the IMS and Australia's national data centre (NDC).
20. A Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) is a critical step towards a world without nuclear weapons. Australia has consistently urged the commencement of negotiations for an FMCT, which would address a critical gap in our non-proliferation and disarmament architecture by stopping the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. We also call on states with nuclear weapons yet to declare and uphold a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons to do so.