Dear Committee Secretariat,

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. It is the pre-eminent voice for the public’s health in Australia, and seeks to drive better health outcomes through increased knowledge, better access and equity, evidence informed policy and effective population-based practice in public health.

PHAA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry into the prerequisites for nuclear energy in Australia. The nuclear fuel process is unsafe – there are direct health and environmental consequences from radioactive leaks, and there is potential contamination at all stages of the process. Without government subsidy, nuclear energy is not cost effective in comparison with renewables, gas or even coal.

Attached is the PHAA’s policy on nuclear energy as a response to global warming, outlining our evidence-based position in more detail.

The PHAA appreciates the opportunity to make this submission and the opportunity to contribute to the transition towards cleaner energy in Australia.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require additional information or have any queries in relation to this submission.

Yours Sincerely,

Terry Slevin
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia

Peter Tait
PHAA Convenor
Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group
Public Health Association of Australia: Policy-at-a-glance – Nuclear Energy as a Response to Global Warming Policy

Key message: 1. The nuclear fuel process is unsafe - there are direct health and environmental consequences from radioactive leaks, and there is potential contamination at all stages of the process.

2. Without government subsidy and in comparison to gas and even coal, nuclear power is not cost effective. Renewable energy systems are already cost comparative and becoming cheaper. Energy use reduction is an immediate strategy that would be more cost effective.

3. There are significant opportunity costs associated with expansion of the nuclear industry. Such expansion would divert much needed resources away from energy use reduction and from renewable energy system research, development and deployment.

4. The nuclear industry does not have the capacity to expand rapidly enough over the next decade to meet projected needs and it generates substantial greenhouse gas emissions through-out the full power generation cycle.

5. Nuclear power is not the answer to reducing global warming.

Summary: PHAA believes there is clear evidence that nuclear power is not the answer to reducing global warming and will advocate against the adoption of nuclear power as a viable option to help mitigate global warming.

Audience: Federal, State and Territory Governments, policy makers and program managers.

Responsibility: PHAA’s Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group (SIG).

Date policy adopted: October 2017

Contacts: Peter Tait & Lea Merone, Co-Convenors, Ecology and Environment SIG
Nuclear Energy as a Response to Global Warming Policy Statement

This policy should be read in conjunction PHAA policies on Safe Climate and Nuclear Industry.

The Public Health Association of Australia notes that:

1. The nuclear fuel process is unsafe. There are direct health and environmental consequences from radioactive leaks, potential contamination at all stages of the process, and natural and industrial incidents occurring at nuclear reactor sites resulting in massive releases of radioactivity.\(^1\)-\(^6\) Since the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, the risk of threats of terrorist attacks on nuclear facilities cannot be regarded as negligible. Similarly, since the tsunami at Fukushima on 11 March 2011,\(^6\) the risk of reactor accidents due to extreme weather events and earthquakes must be recognised as an ongoing, and due to global warming itself, as an increasing threat.\(^7\)

2. The problem of how to safely store nuclear waste is as yet unsolved and the industry is struggling to cope with existing waste. Expansion of the industry will further compound waste problems.\(^8\)

3. Given the poorly controlled link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons, any expansion of nuclear power could result in the potential for the proliferation of nuclear weapons.\(^2,\)\(^5\)

4. Without government subsidy, and in comparison to gas and even coal, nuclear power is not cost effective.\(^2,\)\(^9\) When the full economic costs of operating nuclear plants are factored in, including decommissioning and waste storage, accident risk and capital set-up costs, nuclear becomes even less viable as an affordable option to address climate change.\(^6\) Renewable energy systems are now cost comparative,\(^10\) and with further investment and increased production, will become cheaper without the long term waste and decommissioning costs associated with nuclear.\(^5\) Energy use reduction is an immediate strategy that would be more cost effective than nuclear.\(^8\) Furthermore, there are additional cost efficiencies to be discovered in electricity markets using existing technologies, through optimised national regulation.\(^11\)

5. There are significant opportunity costs associated with expansion of the nuclear industry. Such expansion would divert much needed resources away from energy use reduction and from renewable energy system research, development and deployment.\(^7,\)\(^9\)

6. Proponents of nuclear energy as a solution to global warming support a continued resource consumption model, and propose that a nuclear solution does not require the same need for greater energy efficiency and a reduction in energy consumption as other carbon emission reduction solutions.\(^6,\)\(^9,\)\(^12\) This scenario can cause an increased dependency on coal fired power generation.
technology to act as a back-up system for nuclear power generation, either directly to power stations or as a peak load backup to nuclear generated baseload.9

7. The nuclear industry does not have the capacity to expand rapidly enough over the next decade to meet the projected needs. Even if it were to adopt best practice, when ‘front end’ aspects of nuclear power generation are included, the mining, processing and building of reactors would contribute significantly to the use of fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions,1,5,13 and may increase local effects, such as water warming from reactor cooling discharge.7 Because reactors have a limited life span, back-end aspects such as the decommissioning of plants add to the problems of energy utilisation, as do extreme long term waste storage issues.14,15 Even advocates for nuclear energy note the lack of economic, political and social attraction of nuclear energy, and thus need to call for consistent government incentives to promote nuclear energy.16

The Public Health Association of Australia resolves to undertake the following actions:

8. Advocate against the adoption of nuclear power as a viable option to help mitigate global warming.


First adopted at the 2005 Annual General Meeting of the Public Health Association of Australia. The latest revision has been undertaken as part of the 2017 policy review process.
References


