

Radioactive Waste Policy and Radioactive Waste Management Strategies
NUCLEAR WASTE WATCH BRIEFING NOTE – MARCH 2022

In November 2020 the Minister of Natural Resources announced Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) would lead a review of Canada's radioactive waste policies. This was in response to a set of recommendations in 2019 from a multinational team of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Canada enhance its existing policy and establish an associated national strategy for the management of radioactive wastes.

Over 100 civil society organizations participated in the NRCan policy review between November 2020 and May 2021, engaging in online forums, virtual roundtables, and written submissions. Civil society's main messages included but were not limited to:

- Canada needs an independent agency, arms-length from government and industry, to oversee radioactive waste management and decommissioning; the NWMO is not that agency.
- Radioactive waste should NOT be abandoned; policy should direct perpetual care and monitoring
- Government and industry must be open and transparent in the management of radioactive waste and its transportation
- Indigenous peoples and other Canadians have a right to access information, to engage in decision-making, and to know the risks.
- Policy should explicitly prohibit the importing of radioactive waste from other countries.
- Plutonium extraction (by reprocessing or pyro-processing) from radioactive fuel waste must be prohibited, due to environmental, security and proliferation issues.

During the same time a nuclear industry corporation, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO), began an exercise to develop an “integrated radioactive waste strategy” at the invitation of the Minister of Natural Resources. For the most part civil society organizations have not participated in the NWMO exercise.

Draft Policy: “Modernizing Canada’s Policy for Radioactive Waste Management and Decommissioning”

On February 1, 2022 NRCan released its draft policy on radioactive waste management and decommissioning for public comment, as well as a third and final “What We Heard Report.” The deadline for feedback is April 2, 2022.

The draft policy aspires to address health, safety, security and environmental protection; openness, transparency, and inclusive engagement with Indigenous peoples and others; and a commitment to “global excellence”.

Strengths	Key weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least nominally recognizes Indigenous peoples and references Canada’s commitment to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act - Includes transportation as a related activity - Is more detailed than the 1996 half-page policy it will replace - Acknowledges that Canada has made international commitments it must adhere to - Provides a basis for continued policy debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not establish independent oversight for the nuclear industry and nuclear operations - Does not direct a national standard for the characterization of radioactive waste and maintenance of a verified inventory - Places the nuclear industry in charge of developing waste management strategies, and identifies no role for the federal government, Indigenous peoples or civil society with respect to the development and implementation of an “integrated strategy” for radioactive waste - Indicates that the reprocessing of radioactive wastes would simply be subject to “policy approval” rather than affirming longstanding Canadian policy of disallowing reprocessing - Allows for “exceptions” to a ban on the import of radioactive waste for disposal in Canada

Next Steps

The comment period on the draft policy closes April 2. A single “Joint Engagement Table” session is planned for early March but no public sessions are scheduled. The Minister has made no statement about the draft policy.