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(In Australia) Big bucks, radioactive waste and a biased SA Royal Commission

<https://independentaustralia.net/environment/environment-display/big-bucks-radioactive-waste-and-a-biased-sa-royal-commission,9304>

Big bucks, radioactive waste and a biased SA Royal Commission

Dave Sweeney 1 August 2016, 4:30pm
[EnvironmentMiningEnergy](#)



(Image via treatypublic.net)

Following SA's nuclear fuel cycle Royal Commission, a publicly-funded PR campaign is attempting to make the largest ever radioactive waste dump in the world, a tepid topic, writes [Dave Sweeney](#).

A STATE-BASED Royal Commission unleashed a plan with massive national implications when it

recommended, in May, that South Australia should move to import, store and bury around a third of the globe's high level radioactive waste *as soon as possible*.

The [Royal Commission](#), initiated by Premier [Jay Weatherill](#) in 2015 and presided over by former governor and self-proclaimed state salesman [Kevin Scarce](#), has unsurprisingly generated column inches, congratulations and critics.

Premier Jay Weatherill launches 3 month statewide consultation on SA's involvement in nuclear fuel cycle [@9NewsAdel pic.twitter.com/I9PYsirVNr](#)

♦ Paris Martin (@ParisMartin_9) [July 29, 2016](#)

With its pro-nuclear terms of reference and advisory panel, and its often oblique process, the exercise has been a case study in issue management. Radioactive waste may be hot but a well-funded series of rolling roadshows, a citizens' jury, and a social media initiative are all part of a state campaign working to make the topic tepid and the "conversation" constrained.

The concerns that this approach is focussed more on manufacturing social license or acceptance of the dump plan, rather than forensically and objectively analysing the full range of risks and opportunities, have increased following [news](#) that a key adviser to the nuclear Royal Commission was an industry "true believer" linked to a failed attempt to open a global radioactive waste dump in Australia in the 1990s.

[Pangea Resources](#) was a consortium of nuclear agencies and utilities from Europe and the U.S. that tried to advance a waste dump in Australia during the 1990s, before news of the plan leaked and became a focus of public attention and outrage.

After the company's enforced radioactive retreat from Australia, Pangea's technical manager [Charles McCombie](#) became a foundation partner of [MCM](#), the Swiss based firm contracted by the recent Royal Commission to model economic and technical information, and analyse potential customer demand and economics.

MCM's report strongly influenced the Commission's enthusiastic pro-dump recommendations.

A citizens' jury considering SA's role in the nuclear fuel cycle has kicked off its conversation [@abcnews](https://t.co/DaPS7wM0vD)

♦ Lauren Waldhuter (@laurenwaldhuter) [June 25, 2016](#)

Other economic analysts have cautioned against the "heroic" assumptions underpinning the Royal Commission's final report and there are growing calls for the state treasury department to run the ruler over the sums. But for now, the distorted dollar signs remain in pride of place while the very real danger signs struggle to make the stage.

How times change. In the late 1990s, public outrage forced Pangea to abandon its dumping plan. Today, a pro-nuclear Royal Commission is using public funds to facilitate Pangea's inheritors to rewrite the proposal.

Mr McCombie is also President of [ARIUS](#), the Association for Regional and International Underground Storage. MCM and ARIUS both aim to advance global radioactive waste disposal and neither are independent or objective. This, of course, raises questions about the independence and objectivity of the advice provided to the Royal Commission.

Clearly, any examination of a plan to ship, store and bury the largest amount of the world's worst nuclear waste would require engaging with those industry players who think and work in this space. No surprises, conflicts of interest or covert operations there. But these players should not be allowed, or paid, to shape the fundamental documents, data and discourse surrounding such a contested and lasting public policy issue.

Radioactive waste management is complex, contaminating and costly, and it lasts far longer than any politician or headline. It needs real analysis, not industry assumptions.

[#auspol](#)

Jay Weatherill launches a nuclear propaganda juggernaut <https://t.co/6lvPndQCQQ>
[@IndependentAus](#)

◆ deusexstigma #JA4me (@deusexstigma) [June 1, 2016](#)

The costs involved with the South Australian plan ◆ currently estimated at \$145 billion ◆ are huge and both uncapped and uncertain. The security, safety, environmental and human health implications are profound and permanent. The issue deserves and demands the highest level of scrutiny and transparency, not limited disclosure and insiders promoting a pre-determined agenda.

What is being planned and promoted in South Australia would be by far the largest high level radioactive waste dump in the world and it has never been done before.

MCM has [stated](#) that a positive State Government response to the Royal Commission report would

◆... *change the worldwide paradigm of radioactive waste management.*'

Any moves to further advance this high risk plan should not be based on a report that is compromised, deeply deficient and unfit for purpose.

South Australians ◆ and all of us ◆ deserve better.

[Dave Sweeney](#) is the nuclear free campaigner with the Australian Conservation Foundation. You can follow him on Twitter [@nukedavesweeney](#).

Why are we even wasting money to consider making Aus the toilet for the world's toxic nuclear waste ?<https://t.co/PPpKhbGi3t> [@IndependentAus](#)

◆ Michelle Pini (@vmp9) [May 10, 2016](#)