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NUCLEAR WASTE REPOSITORY

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Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said the alternative to rejecting a nuclear waste repository was to reject nuclear technology which is now an established part of our 21st Century life.

“Try to imagine a world without X-rays, radiology, soil testing, radiotherapy, scans, exit signs in buildings, and the ability to track hidden courses as diverse as underground water or blood circulation in the body.

“As Port Lincoln Mayor Peter Davis said, if we don’t support a waste repository, then we shouldn’t have smoke detectors, glow in the dark watches, cancer treatments, microwaves, and road surveying technology.”

Mrs Penfold was speaking in Parliament in opposition to a Bill to set up a referendum on a nuclear waste storage facility in South Australia.

She said nuclear waste products have to go somewhere. “Let us store that waste in the most appropriate geographical and politically safe location possible,” she said.

Mrs Penfold said Premier Mike Rann was very keen to fritter away the state’s funds on a referendum.

“It has been estimated that such a referendum would cost about \$6.4 million for the Electoral Commission alone, without the educating process that is essential to enable people to make a choice,” she said.

“A good leader accepts responsibility along with the power that accompanies leadership. It seems that Premier Mike Rann wants the power without the responsibility.”

Mrs Penfold pointed out that the 1991 State Labor Government of which Mike Rann was a cabinet member was actively involved with the then Labor Federal government in seeking a national nuclear waste repository. The Labor Party, at both state and federal level, has been searching for a nuclear waste repository since at least 1986.

She asked, Why were they willing in 1986 to acknowledge acceptable selected sites under a Federal Labor Government but in 2002, under a Federal Liberal Government, those same potential sites are suddenly taboo?

Mrs Penfold said the fear of radiation health effects, particularly from severe accidents and radioactive waste, is central to public concerns about the nuclear industry.

She said the potential negatives of the nuclear industry must be ascertained and adequate safeguards put in place, as is done in other industries.

“However radiation is part of the environment. It is a natural component of the air, the earth, our homes, the

food we eat, and the human body.”

Mrs Penfold said it would be a major step forward when the nuclear industry is considered in the same way as fossil fuels or chemicals.

“I doubt that anyone would propose that the chemical industry be abandoned yet this has the potential to cause massive ill health, deaths and environmental disasters.

“The 1984 accident at a chemical plant at Bhopal in India caused about 3000 early deaths and severely affected the health of several hundred thousand,” she said.

“The disposal of empty chemical drums and waste oil is a concern. However the concern is met with commonsense so that acceptable, practical solutions are worked out.”

Mrs Penfold said that when the nuclear waste debate gained momentum a couple of years ago, a then 17-year-old supported the establishment of a waste repository in South Australia to take all grades of nuclear waste. His comment was that South Australia could charge for material deposited in such a facility, thus generating revenue for the state – revenue that could be used for health, education, roads, scientific research or any of the many other areas where the government never has funds to meet the perceived needs.

“The suggestion is one that I have heard regularly since from all age groups, and is one that I support,” she said.

Mrs Penfold quoted environmentalist Terry Krieg, of Port Lincoln, “I didn’t create the problem but I’m prepared to help find a solution. We can help isolate the waste from the environment forever and it will be good for the earth and for the South Australian economy.”