

MONTE BELLO ISLANDS

The Minister for National Development, Mr Newman, announced today that a program of radioactive waste management has been completed at the Monte Bello Islands off the north west coast of Western Australia. The Islands were the site of nuclear weapon tests carried out by the United Kingdom in 1952 and 1956.

The management program was undertaken in accordance with interim advice prepared by the Australian Ionising Radiation Advisory Council (AIRAC). AIRAC's formal Report was tabled in Parliament today by the Minister for Science and the Environment, Senator the Hon. J.J. Webster.

AIRAC's Report noted that "it is difficult to imagine that a casual visitor could now come to any harm. Therefore simple warning notices should provide sufficient control without the necessity for fences or for total prohibition from the area".

Mr Newman said that the program of radioactive waste management at Monte Bello was undertaken in May this year, with on site work and logistics being carried out on behalf of the Department of National Development by Army field engineers of 22 Construction Squadron from Perth and officers and crew of HMAS Tarakan.

The Controller of Safety from the Australian Atomic Energy Commission accompanied the field party and an officer of the Western Australian Government joined the party as an observer.

Multi-lingual signs conveying radiation hazard warnings advising against permanent occupation have been erected in the vicinity of the test sites on Trimouille and Alpha Islands and on Trimouille Island adjacent to the offshore test explosion on HMAS Plym.

Concrete plinths have been constructed at the location of the two on-shore test sites noting the year of the test and also conveying radiation warnings.

To the extent practicable, areas in the immediate vicinity of the on-shore test sites have been cleared of radioactive debris and residual structures. Other structures erected for the purposes of the tests, principally concrete block houses, were examined by Army engineers for safety.

AIRAC's Report notes that surveys were undertaken in 1962, 1968 and 1972 of the areas of radioactive contamination left by the tests. The surveys revealed small areas on Trimouille and Alpha Islands where radiation levels, although declining, remained above the limits recommended for continuous occupancy.

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In October 1978 a further survey was undertaken by scientists from the Australian Radiation Laboratory and the Western Australian Department of Public Health. The results of the survey form part of AIRAC's Report. The Commonwealth appreciates the cooperation which was provided by the Western Australian Government.

In addition to the recommendations contained in the Council's interim advice, the Report recommends that signs on the Islands also carry a warning against removal of residual metallic and other debris from the Islands. Erection of the additional warning will be arranged when a field party next visits the area.

Preliminary discussions on the future management of the Monte Bello Islands were held recently with officials of the Western Australian Government. Control of the area is currently exercised by the Commonwealth Government. The Islands are a Prohibited Area under the Defence (Special Undertakings) Act 1952, and persons wishing to enter the area are required to obtain the permission of the Naval Officer Commanding Western Australia Area, P.O. Box 228, Rockingham, W.A. 6168.