

# CABINET MINUTE

BRISBANE, 31/1/1989

DECISION NO.

55991

SUBJECT: Management of Radioactive Waste.

(Submission No. 50468)

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C O N F I D E N T I A L  
C A B I N E T M I N U T E

Brisbane, 31st January, 1939

Decision No. 55991

Submission No. 50468

TITLE: Management of Radioactive Waste.

CABINET decided:-

That the current contract on the Redbank site be continued.

CIRCULATION: Department of Works and copy to Minister.  
Premier's Department and copy to Premier and Treasurer.  
Treasury Department and copy to Minister.  
Department of Health and copy to Minister.  
Department of Mines and copy to Minister.  
All other Ministers for perusal and return.

*Correct*  
Certified True Copy



*W. H. H. H.*  
Secretary to Cabinet.





Submission No. \_\_\_\_\_

21

Copy No. \_\_\_\_\_

FOR CABINETRE: MANAGEMENT OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

1. Ministers will recall that Cabinet by Decision No. 55385 of the 24th October, 1988 Cabinet decided inter alia -

"That the Redbank site be set aside for the purposes of management of radioactive waste and that early action be taken for provision of a custom built facility on the site".

2. The Department of Works, in proceeding with this project, has encountered difficulties from Building Trade Unions and the local Community Residents Action Group, the result of which has been to stop progress on the construction work.
3. Radioactive material is currently stored in a disused air-raid shelter at the Boundary Street Wharf. There are indications that the concrete building was inundated with one to two metre depth of water during the 1974 floods. Rainwater penetration into the building is evident through the roof and walls. Funds have recently been approved to repair all metal deck roof sheeting, which has been damaged by rock falls from the adjacent unstable cliff face.
4. The existing storage facilities have reached a stage where the maximum desirable internal radiation level, as determined by the Division of Health and Medical Physics, and the lack of additional storage space necessitates that alternate accommodation should be provided in the near future.
5. A number of criteria were considered in investigating potential sites. The site should be flood free and as close as possible to Brisbane to allow easy access for transport and for scientific personnel who will be required to dismantle equipment at the facility, and safety store the material. Ready access to the site is highly desirable, to minimise the distance the material has to be carried on vehicles.
6. In the event of an attempted unauthorised entry, security personnel and/or police should be within easy access. The building should be accessible to emergency vehicles, and delivery vehicles. Some equipment might require semi-trailer transport, and service roads must be designed to accommodate same.
7. Allowing for a desirable buffer zone around the building, it is envisaged that an area of approximately 60 metres x 50 metres will be necessary. Water, electrical and telephone services will be required.
8. The Department of Works, in conjunction with Officers of the Department of Health, investigated various sites within Brisbane and the environs. Such investigations include sites adjacent Nathan Government Chemical Laboratory, Boundary Street Wacol, Montgomery Street Redbank, Health Department Reserve Wacol, Magazine Reserve Helidon, and Prison Reserve Palen Creek. Investigations also included the erection of a complex adjacent the existing facilities at the Boundary Street Wharf. It is understood that the Department of Health also considered Bundaberg as a possible location.

9. The Redbank site adjacent the SITMARS Complex was considered suitable because of its proximity to Brisbane, accessibility to transport, is readily accessible to technical and security personnel, is relatively isolated from present and future development, and it is afforded all services.
10. Investigations indicate that there are no foundation problems associated with the Redbank site, and closely spaced deep core drilling has discounted the possibility of underground mining beneath the structure. The proposed floor level of the facility will be approximately 4.5 metres above the 1974 flood level, and approximately 8 metres above the "post-Wivenhoe" level.
11. Tenders were received on 9th December, 1988 for the construction of the project at Redbank, and the contract was awarded to Sommer and Staff Constructions Pty. Ltd. On-site works commenced on 19th December, 1988 but due to action by the Building Trade Group of Unions and the Community Residents Action Group works ceased on 13th January, 1989. The site is now "black listed". Attempts to recommence works have been fruitless.
12. The Ipswich City Council, in letters to both the Department of Works and Department of Health, have expressed concern at the siting of the project within the City of Ipswich - a declared "nuclear free zone". Plans of the project have been forwarded to the Council for their information, and efforts have been made to assure the Council of all safety aspects related to the project.
13. The dispute between the Contractor and the Unions was heard before Commissioner G. Ashwood of the Industrial Commission at 3.15 p.m. on Wednesday, 18th January, 1989, but the matter was held over until the Union delegates had received a response to correspondence forwarded to the Honourable Ivan Gibbs, M.L.A., Minister for Health. It is understood that the dispute may also have been registered with the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.
14. OPTIONS
  - (a) Continue with the current contract on the Redbank site. While the dispute is between the Builder and the Unions, it is likely that some assistance would need to be provided to allow the Builder to proceed with the works. This would depend on the outcome of proceedings, before Commissioner Ashwood.
  - (b) Cease work on the Redbank site either by terminating the contract by agreement or by directing the Contractor not to proceed, thereby suspending the work indefinitely. In either case, the Builder would be entitled to damages, based on loss of profit and costs actual or incurred to date. The difficult task of finding an alternative site would also need to be addressed.

Submitted for the information of Cabinet.

BRISBANE.

W.A.M. Gunn,  
Deputy Premier and  
Minister for Public Works,  
Housing and Main Roads