

Fukushima 12 years on:

growing costs, concerns and contamination

MAPW - ACF joint statement

March 2023

It is now a dozen years since the world held its breath and learned to pronounce the word Fukushima.

The Great Eastern earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, devastated large areas of Japan's eastern seaboard.

It also breached the safety and back-up systems at the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO's) Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex leading to mass evacuations, hundreds of billions of dollars in economic loss and the release of large amounts of radioactive contamination to the air and ocean.

Over AU\$120 billion has already been spent stabilising the stricken site and the crisis continues today. Japanese nuclear authorities have confirmed that active intervention will be required for the next 40 years and there are contested and continuing releases of radioactive water to the Pacific and mounting waste management concerns.

Fukushima was and remains a profound environmental, economic and human disaster that continues to negatively impact lives in Japan and far beyond.

Following the disaster, large volumes of contaminated water have been collected and stored. This includes water used to cool nuclear fuel rods and in other site operations along with groundwater, rainwater and seepage water – all with elevated levels of contaminants.

Between 100 and 300 tonnes of water are collected each day and there are more than one thousand large tanks holding around 1.3 million tonnes of contaminated water on site. TEPCO plans to directly discharge this waste to the Pacific for years, starting in 2023.

TEPCO intends to treat the water prior to discharge to remove some contaminants using a process known as the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS).

This pumping and filtration process is meant to remove and dilute radioactive isotopes from the liquid, but some remain, especially tritium. There are also concerns that the treatment fails to adequately deal with other contaminants, including strontium, iodine and cobalt.

The proposed ocean dumping is actively opposed by coastal and fishing communities in Japan and is highly controversial in both Korea and China.

It is also a cause for growing concern and heartache among the wider Pacific community given the adverse environmental and cultural impacts and the tension between the planned action and the prohibition of radioactive waste dumping in the *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (1985)*.

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) engaged an independent expert advisory panel to undertake a detailed assessment of the dumping plan. This assessment criticised the assumptions, data analysis and modelling underpinning TEPCO's approach and in August 2022, the PIF was advised that the plan was premature, lacked a sound scientific basis and should be postponed pending a detailed consideration of alternative management options.

ACF, MAPW and other civil society groups are urging the federal Labor government to add Australia's voice to those calling for a halt to the current plan in favour of a more evidence based and agreed approach to this pressing transboundary and transgenerational issue.



PIF Secretary General Henry Puna has stated that the “ultimate goal is to safeguard the Blue Pacific – our ocean, our environment, and our peoples – from any further nuclear contamination. This is the legacy we must leave for our children.”

Our shared Pacific is a place of richness, life and culture. It is not a sewer.

Against the shadow of Fukushima, the current domestic pro-nuclear push is even more inappropriate as Australia has a direct connection with this disaster.

In October 2011, it was formally confirmed to the Australian Parliament that Australian uranium was fuelling the Fukushima complex at the time of the disaster.

The then head of the Australian Safeguards and Nuclear Safety Office – a unit of DFAT charged with tracking Australian uranium – told a Senate Committee, “...we can confirm that Australian obligated nuclear material {uranium} was at the Fukushima Daiichi site and in each of the reactors.”

Australian radioactive rocks are the source of Fukushima’s fallout and waste. And large volumes of this waste are now planned to be directly released into the Pacific Ocean.

We cannot change the past, but we can act to shape the future. On this 12th anniversary of Fukushima, MAPW and ACF are calling on the Australian government to:

- Join with the wider Pacific community and formally urge Japan to defer the planned direct ocean dumping of contaminated water to the Pacific and instead review alternative waste management options.
- Undertake a review of the environmental, cultural, health and security impacts of Australia’s uranium sector and whether the existing nuclear safeguards are adequate.
- Continue to reject any moves for domestic nuclear power and elevate efforts to transition to renewable energy.

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