



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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Media Statement

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Return Lynas radioactive waste to Australia

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) and SahabatAlam Malaysia (SAM) welcome the Malaysian government's move in not giving in to the pressure by LynasMalaysia SdnBhd to revoke the previous operating conditions imposed in 2020, most importantly regarding shifting of the cracking and leaching process (which involves radioactive material) to outside of Malaysia.

In a media statement yesterday, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, YB Chang Lih-Kang confirmed that the earlier condition that Lynas must stop importing and processing rare earths concentrate after July 1, 2023 is maintained. This means that Lynas can only refine the materials at the Gebeng plant. The "cracking and leaching" of lanthanide concentrate cannot be done here.

The renewal of the three-year licence granted to Lynas in 2020 also subjected Lynas to develop a permanent disposal facility (PDF) for its radioactive waste, and there can be no more importing of materials carrying low-level radioactive waste into Malaysia from July 2023.

In all these years of operations, Lynas has yet to put in place a PDF for the waste from the Water Leach Purification (WLP) process which contains radioactive wastes including thorium and uranium. Only last year the environmental impact assessment (EIA) report for the PDF in Gebeng was approved by the Department of Environment, which has raised concerns by concerned groups over the suitability of the site from safety and environmental grounds as it is located in flood prone and peat swamp area. The EIA approval is now being challenged by concerned citizens.

In our opinion, any site chosen for the PDF is a major problem as there are concerns over whether radioactive wastes can be safely disposed of when it is radioactive for hundreds of years or centuries. The WLP waste contains thorium radionuclides which are active for 14 billion years.

We cannot disregard the ill effects of low-level radiation lightly. Exposure to low levels of radiation may not cause immediate health effects but are hazardous nevertheless as they can contribute to overall cancer risks.

We are disappointed that the Malaysian government has not decided to shift the remaining radioactive wastes back to Australia, where the wastes can be kept in a semi-arid and remote area, at the Mount Weld site, from where the raw materials for the Lynas plant are sourced.

The Malaysian government should liaise with the Australian government on the safe handling and transport of these radioactive wastes back to Australia in accordance with relevant international conventions because radioactive wastes are not under the scope of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

We should no longer carry the burden of storing radioactive waste for generations to come.

The government should remain steadfast with its decision and ensure that Lynas does not conduct any more processes that generate radioactive waste and ensure what has been generated thus far by Lynas is returned to Australia.

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