



# BLACK MIST

The impact of nuclear weapons on Australia



**black mist** *n.* A dark grey cloud of radioactive fallout dispersed in a nuclear explosion.

*From the Yankuntjatjara word “puyu”.*



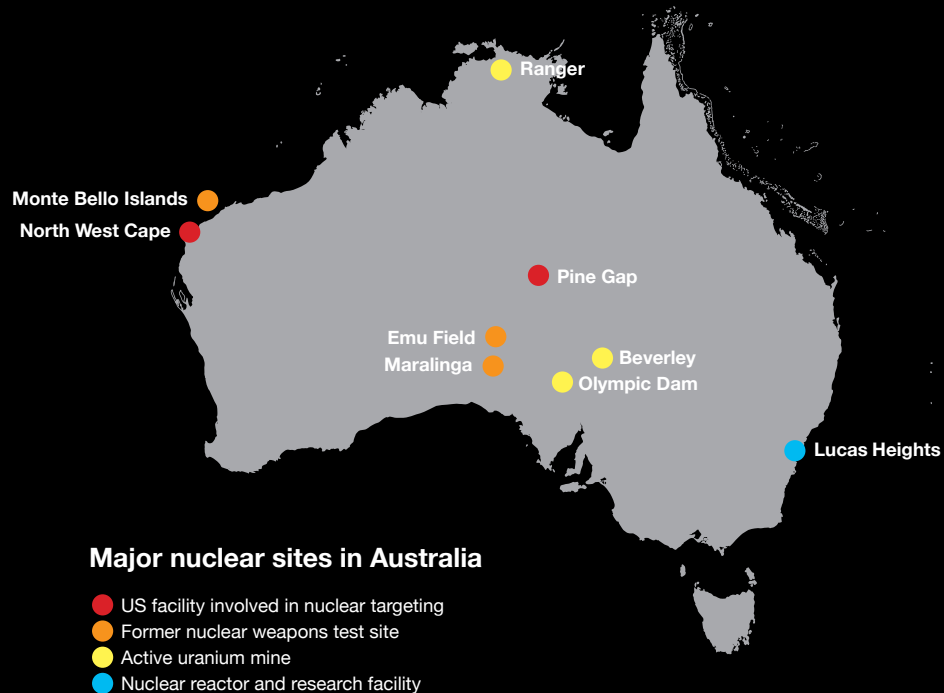
**WARNING** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this publication may contain images and names of people who are deceased.

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**F**or many Australians, nuclear weapons are not a distant, abstract threat, but a lived reality – a persistent source of pain and suffering, of contamination and dislocation. Indigenous communities, long marginalised and mistreated in Australia, bear the brunt of this ongoing scourge.

From 1952 to 1963, the British government, with the active participation of the Australian government, conducted 12 major nuclear test explosions and up to 600 so-called “minor trials” in the South Australian outback and off the West Australian coast. Radioactive contamination from the tests was detected across much of the continent. At the time and for decades after, the authorities denied, ignored and covered up the health dangers.

The “minor trials” dispersed 24.4 kg of plutonium in 50,000 fragments, beryllium, and 8 tonnes of uranium. Little was done to protect the 16,000 or so test site workers, and even less to protect nearby Indigenous communities. Today, survivors suffer from higher rates of cancer than the general population due to their exposure to radiation. Only a few have ever been compensated. Much of the traditional land used for the blasts remains radioactive and off limits to this day.



But this is not the full extent of Australia's role in inflicting nuclear harm. For decades, the government has fuelled the production of nuclear weapons, particularly in the US and Britain, by exporting uranium. Among the newest recipients of Australian nuclear bomb fuel are nuclear-armed China and Russia. A deal with India is now being brokered. The dirty and dangerous uranium industry destroys communities, defiles the environment and increases cancer risks among mine workers and nearby populations.

The Australian government also hosts military and intelligence facilities that are vital to US preparations for nuclear war – most notably Pine Gap and North West Cape. While cross-party parliamentary inquiries have repeatedly identified an absence of credible military threats to Australia, successive governments have confirmed that several US bases in Australia would be high-priority nuclear targets in a nuclear war involving the US.

Despite the Australian government's insistence that nuclear weapons are necessary and legitimate instruments of national defence, public opinion polls show that Australians overwhelmingly reject these worst weapons of terror and want them banned. This booklet is an urgent call to action. It presents the testimonies of eight remarkable Australians whose lives have been irrevocably changed by the bomb, and who have fought courageously over many years to free our world from this ultimate menace.



## Yami Lester

### Yankunytjatjara elder and nuclear test survivor

It was in the morning, around seven. I was just playing with the other kids. That's when the bomb went off. I remember the noise, it was a strange noise, not loud, not like anything I'd ever heard before. The earth shook at the same time; we could feel the whole place move. We didn't see anything, though. Us kids had no idea what it was. I just kept playing.

It wasn't long after that a black smoke came through. A strange black smoke, it was shiny and oily. A few hours later we all got crook, every one of us. We were all vomiting; we had diarrhoea, skin rashes and sore eyes. I had really sore eyes. They were so sore I couldn't open them for two or three weeks. Some of the older people, they died. They were too weak to survive all of the sickness. The closest clinic was 400 miles away.

#### WALLATINNA STATION, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Yami Lester** was 10 years old when the "Totem 1" nuclear test was conducted near his home in 1953. His eyes stung as a result, and four years later he lost all sight. Since the 1980s he has been a leading advocate on behalf of Indigenous communities affected by the tests.



Credit: Jessie Boylan



National Missile Park, Woomera. Credit: Jessie Boylan

## Avon Hudson

### Whistleblower and nuclear test veteran

We were innocent – lambs to the slaughter – and have been treated with contempt by Australian governments of both political persuasions trying to sweep their tarnished history under the carpet. We *have* suffered; for many of our friends, life was cruelly taken away or changed forever by an unseen and largely unknown foe – ionising radiation.

We were naïve and trusting of our government. Now they are waiting for us to die. This is an uncomfortable history for many a politician, because it cannot be spoken of in the abstract – families are still suffering. At the time of the tests, the Australian public was deliberately and ruthlessly kept in the dark concerning the real effects of the atomic bomb explosions and the so-called “minor trials”.

### PORT WAKEFIELD, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Avon Hudson** was a serviceman at Maralinga during some of the disastrous “minor trials” of 1958 to 1962. With his intimate first-hand knowledge of the effects of radiation on human health, he is now a passionate campaigner for a nuclear-weapon-free world.



## Yvonne Margarula

### Mirarr Senior Traditional Owner

My name is Yvonne Margarula. I am the Senior Traditional Owner of Mirarr country in Kakadu, Australia. In the 1970s the government and mining company came here and forced the Ranger uranium mine on us. All Bininj [Aboriginal people] were against the mine, but we could not stop it. Our land has suffered. We lost billabongs and rivers. Often we are worried because of the mine. We use the water for fishing, swimming and drinking. In my heart I feel that things would be better if there were no mining here. But we Mirarr are strong and will use the opportunities to create a better future.

#### KAKADU, NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Yvonne Margarula's** tireless work to protect her country is world renowned. In the 1990s she led the successful campaign to stop a second uranium mine, Jabiluka, from being built on Mirarr land. Australian uranium has been used to produce British and US nuclear weapons, and the Australian government continues to export uranium to nuclear-armed nations, contributing to global proliferation dangers.

Yvonne's late father, **Toby Gangale**, outlined his concerns about the Ranger uranium mine in 1978: "I don't like the mine you see. Very dangerous. What if they make an atom bomb or something? Very dangerous: the same thing as they did in Japan. Flat. All the big houses, all the big buildings. Very dangerous. That's why we're worried." The Ranger mine continues to operate today, despite Mirarr concerns.



Yvonne Margarula at the Ranger uranium mine. Credit: Dominic O'Brien



Junko Morimoto during a live art performance in Melbourne in 2012. Credit: Takako Drew

## Junko Morimoto

Artist, author and atomic bomb survivor

My life was quite peaceful before the atomic bombing. I was living happily. I enjoyed day-to-day life, doing things like learning to dance and playing with my friends. At the time, I believed my life would continue like this forever. I was 13 years old.

While talking to my sister, I heard a loud *boom!* and we were surrounded by an incredible light and heatwave. In the moments soon after, we were hit with an earth-shattering roar. It got really, really dark as if day had suddenly turned into night. We were in a pile of rubble that had once been our home. Surrounded by screams, it was as if I were in hell. There was a child screaming, trying to wake her dead mother.

### SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES

**Junko Morimoto** is a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. She migrated to Australia from Japan in 1982. Her picture books are widely read by schoolchildren throughout the world and include the autobiographical *My Hiroshima*.



## Tom Uren

Former prisoner of war and government minister

In the last year of World War II, I was a prisoner of war in Japan. It was at Omura, across the water from Nagasaki, that I saw the sky turn crimson. I've seen the most beautiful sunsets in Central Australia, the Northern Territory, but this was a magnification of one of those sunsets by about 20 times.

Years after the war, I went to Hiroshima and I saw the burns where frocks had been imprinted on people's bodies. As I got to understand nuclear war and the nuclear industry, I realised that the dropping of those bombs on Japan had been a crime against humanity.

### SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES

**Tom Uren** served as a member of parliament for 32 years, including as a minister in the Whitlam and Hawke governments. Having witnessed the bombing of Nagasaki in 1945, he became a strong opponent of nuclear weapons and uranium mining.

**Main:** The atomic cloud over Nagasaki in 1945. *Credit: Hiromichi Matsuda*  
**Inset:** Mr Uren (centre) leads a rally in Sydney in 1984. *Credit: William Yang*







A satellite image of Pine Gap. Credit: Google Earth

## Mitch

### Aranda woman and anti-nuclear activist

No one asked us and no one will. It's not safe and never will be. They should go back to the USA and do their spying from there, not on our land. Nuke weapons show how uncivilised the USA really is. The world needs to stand up to all nuke weapon holders and say "no, not now, not ever".

### ALICE SPRINGS, NORTHERN TERRITORY



**Mitch** is an anti-nuclear and land rights activist. She has long protested against Pine Gap – one of the largest US military and intelligence facilities in the world – which was built on her people's land without their permission. Because of its role in nuclear targeting, it is a nuclear target itself, endangering the lives of Alice Springs residents.

## Dick Sundstrom

### Former naval airman and nuclear test veteran

It happened at 8.00 am on 3 October 1952. We had departed Sydney for a “mystery” cruise on 30 August 1952, eventually arriving in the Monte Bellos on 27 September. We were dressed in sandals, shorts and T-shirts. The HMAS *Sydney* had a crew of around 1300, and hundreds of us witnessed the explosion from the flight deck. The radioactive cloud came right over us – we watched it for about one and a half hours.

We were totally unaware that there was any danger from radioactive fallout. I have had 170 skin cancers removed and a low-grade B-cell lymphoma removed. An MRI scan has shown extensive lymph problems at the back of my throat. I am sorry to say that my daughter was born with a hole in her back; nobody knew what caused it. I have often wondered about the connection between this and my exposure to radiation.\*

### TRARALGON, VICTORIA

**Dick Sundstrom** was a naval airman, in the armaments section, when he witnessed the first British atomic bomb test in Australia, conducted in 1952 in the Monte Bello Islands off the West Australian coast. The 25-kiloton explosion, nicknamed “Operation Hurricane”, spread radioactivity across large portions of the mainland.

\* Reproduced from *Beyond Belief* (2005) with permission of the authors.



A nuclear test explosion in the Monte Bello Islands in 1956.



## Sue Coleman-Haseldine

### Kokatha-Mula woman and nuclear test survivor

I was about three when it happened. The old people used to talk about the Nullarbor dust storm, which really wasn't a dust storm at all. It must have been the fallout from Maralinga. We've had thyroid problems in the family, and it's not just us, it's the whole of the west coast of South Australia. We've had quite a lot of problems like that, health-wise. And when someone says somebody's just died, you ask what from and it's always cancer, cancer, cancer. But as we all know, nobody can prove that the radiation caused the cancer. People have put in for compensation, but because there's no proof that the illnesses stem from the explosions, there is none.

#### CEDUNA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Sue Coleman-Haseldine** was born in 1951 at the Koonibba mission near Maralinga, a site of British nuclear testing. She won the South Australian premier's award for excellence in Indigenous leadership in 2007 for her work as an activist, cultural teacher and environmental defender.



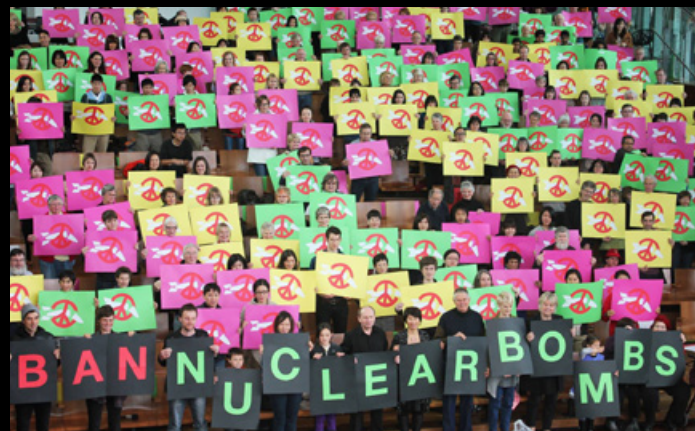
Nuclear test survivors Kevin Buzzacott and Sue Coleman-Haseldine in 2013. Credit: Jessie Boylan





## Take action

Eliminating nuclear weapons is an urgent humanitarian necessity. Please sign the ICAN petition for a nuclear weapons ban online at [www.icanw.org](http://www.icanw.org) and collect signatures for our global parliamentary appeal. Hold events to raise awareness about nuclear dangers, and share our resources online. Together, we can build a powerful groundswell of support for a ban.



[www.icanw.org](http://www.icanw.org)



“War makes me scared. War is scary. But war with nuclear bombs would be even scarier. Just thinking about it makes me shiver. No one would be safe in nuclear war. Those nuclear bombs are no good. We gotta make sure nobody uses them, and we gotta support anyone who’s trying to stop them.”

**– YAMI LESTER, YANKUNYTJATJARA ELDER AND NUCLEAR TEST SURVIVOR**

