

About the Atomic Age

On Australian territory, between 1952 and 1967, British scientists tested twelve atomic bombs, performed hundreds of 'minor trials', and attempted unsuccessful clean ups. Test sites were at Monte Bello Islands off the West Australian coast, and at Emu and Maralinga in the South Australian desert. [1] These were, and remain, scientific experiments that continue to play out in the ill health and changed lives of Aboriginal people and nuclear veterans from Australia and Britain.

The promises of post-cold-war nuclear disarmament lie broken. There have been more than 2,000 nuclear weapons tests since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, yet only partial justice for atomic survivors. The contamination of landscape and the ongoing impacts on descendants of those exposed to radiation through bomb testing endures. Next year, 2015, marks the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings on Japan, the beginning of the atomic age.

In July this year in Britain (2014), Prime Minister Cameron issued the first public statement of its kind to the Parliament, recognising the impacts on British nuclear veterans who serviced at the atomic tests in Australia, and the long-range consequences for their families. Currently, work progresses towards the establishment of a £25 benevolent fund planned to offer assistance to affected British families.

While such recognition in Australia remains absent, the slow reveal of the cover-ups and of South Australia's own atomic legacies continues. Most recently, journalist Frank Walker published his chilling book *Maralinga* (2014, Hachette Press) documenting newly accessed archival information about the tests, including the expose of Australia's secret bone collection program where samples of an estimated 22,000 bones, of Australians aged zero to middle age (predominantly of young children), were collected between 1957 and 1978.

On the global stage, contemporary threats such as climate change and shifting political dynamics between nuclear power states fuel renewed world-wide concern about the consequences of the nuclear age - a future already colonised by residual radioactivity from continuing tests and legacies of Cold War.

In response, the *Nuclear Futures* program is a three year arts and cultural program funded by the Australia Council for the Arts that continues a tradition of creative artists responding to atomic weapons tests and their legacies. The program is coordinated by Sydney production company *Alphaville* and works with atomic survivor communities in five countries using shared creative arts processes for storytelling and art-making.

While Australia's atomic history is complex and confronting, it remains a relevant and important Australian story. The *Ten Minutes to Midnight* production aims to present a poetic and sensitive interpretation of this history, blending contemporary and experimental arts with oral history and archival research to illuminate the spectres within current debates.

[1] Commonwealth of Australia, 1985. The Report of the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia, Appendix G Chronology.

© Alphaville, 2014

www.nuclearfutures.org

Press Kit available: www.nuclearfutures.org
info@nuclearfutures.org or 0422 178 739

