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HCR 11, HD 1
REQUESTING BAN ON DISPOSAL OF NUCLEAR WASTE MATERIALS
IN THE PACIFIC BASIN

Statement for
Senate Committee on
Economic Development
Public Hearing - 3 April 1984

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HCR 11, HD 1 would request that the disposal of nuclear waste materials be banned in the Pacific Basin. This statement on the resolutions does not reflect an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

In commenting on the resolution, we make the assumption that substantial quantities of nuclear wastes will continue to be generated and that these wastes will have to be disposed of somewhere. Without question there are environmental hazards associated with all possible means of disposal. However, there are differences in the environmental hazards depending on whether the wastes to be disposed of are high-level or low-level wastes and on whether the disposal sites are on the land surface, beneath the land surface, in the water column, on the sea bed, or beneath the sea bed.

We note that Congress has imposed a 2-year moratorium on the disposal of low-level wastes in the ocean; that the majority of the members of the London Dumping Convention voted in February 1983 in favor of such a moratorium; and that the future possibility of oceanic disposal of these wastes will depend on the results of research in progress. We note also that, at present, the disposal of high-level wastes in the ocean is prohibited by international agreement. There seems to be some question whether the prohibition applies to disposal deep beneath the sea floor, and some nations have held that the prohibition should be reconsidered if warranted on the basis of research results.

We certainly agree that "there has been no guarantee that basic technology has been developed which will ensure safety in the disposal" of the nuclear wastes. However, some of us are concerned with the reference in the resolution to banning the disposal of nuclear wastes in the Pacific basin without qualification as to type of waste, disposal method, or disposal site. We would suggest the greater appropriateness of recommending a ban on the disposal or, better, a moratorium, until the safety of some method of disposal of some type of waste in some type of site has been demonstrated by the results of sound research. Our reason for this suggestion is that the recommendation for a ban without qualification may have a chilling effect on the planning and conduct of research that might demonstrate, not only the acceptability, but the superiority of some combination of type of waste, disposal method, and disposal site in the Pacific Basin. There are reasons for believing that the risks of disposal of some of the more troublesome waste materials may perhaps be considerably less significant in certain parts of the Pacific Basin than anywhere else. The sites that are of particular interest at present are deep beneath the seabed in parts of the Pacific remote from Hawaii.

We are in agreement that the research required to demonstrate with adequate certainty that the disposal of nuclear wastes in this part of the Pacific or any other oceanic area will be substantial.