

## Draft Briefing Paper

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RESETTLEMENT OF ENEU ISLAND BIKINI ATOLL  
Request of the Secretary of the InteriorSummary:

The Secretary has received a request (Tab A) from Interior Secretary William Clark for advice regarding the possible resettlement of Bikini people on Eneu Island in their home Atoll. In 1979, the DOE response to a similar request led to a decision by then Under Secretary of the Interior James Joseph to place Eneu Island "off limits as a place of residence for the Bikini people for at least another 20-25 years" (Tab B). In view of recent developments, some of which are discussed below, a prompt review and response to Secretary Clark is in order.

Background:

The people of Bikini Atoll (167 persons) were removed from their atoll by the United States in 1946 to permit Bikini lands and waters to be used for atmospheric nuclear testing. Having been relocated to areas which were remote from the testing sites, the people sustained no significant radiation exposures from the tests, but their home islands, and especially the main residence island, Bikini, were contaminated with radioactive test debris. After a cleanup and rehabilitation program and the release of the atoll from further U.S. use, a small number of Bikinians (about 140 of the current population of about 1100) resettled Bikini Island during the period 1969-1978. DOE continued to monitor the Bikini environment and the resettled Bikinians during this period. By the mid 1970's, as locally grown foods became increasingly available, and as DOE studies established the importance of the food chain as the dominant contributor to radiation dose, DOE surveillance was intensified.

Early in 1978, it became evident that under the conditions then existing at Bikini Island the resettled residents would not be expected to stay within the U.S. Federal guidelines for exposure to radiation. This led to the second relocation of Bikinians from their atoll in August 1978. Recognizing the strong desire of the Bikini people to return to their homeland, the two departments (DOE and DOI) considered in 1979 whether Eneu Island, a somewhat smaller island in Bikini Atoll, six miles distant from Bikini, might be suitable for resettlement.

On April 12, 1979, Under Secretary Joseph wrote to then Assistant Secretary of Energy Ruth Clusen and, in Secretary Joseph's words "...insisted that a definitive statement on the use of Eneu Island, Bikini Atoll, was an absolute necessity..." Secretary Clusen replied on May 15, 1979, with a lengthy and detailed analysis of the Eneu situation and, although she did not make a categorical or definitive recommendation, her letter left the Department of the Interior little choice but to take a conservative position on Eneu resettlement. The wording of Secretary Joseph's decision--"off limits...for...20-25 years"--may be viewed as somewhat stronger than was justified, but is understandable, considering the popular sensitivities and apprehensions regarding radiation matters.

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The Bikini people continue in their strong desire to resettle their home atoll. Responding to their request, the 97th Congress authorized and funded (\$400K) an independent study of the feasibility of rehabilitating Bikini Atoll. The study committee was chaired by Dr. Henry Kohn, Professor Emeritus of Radiation Biology, Harvard Medical School, and issued its interim report in early 1984. The report (page 22) indicates that Eneu may be resettled now.

In Congressional testimony\* on May 1, 1984, Professor Kohn stated: "Some of the islands are safe for resettlement now. The important one of these is Eneu (1.2 km<sup>2</sup>)." Dr. Kohn's conclusions and those of his independent committee (The Bikini Atoll Rehabilitation Committee) are largely based upon DOE sponsored field studies and upon calculations of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under DP's Marshall Islands Program (managed by NV).

Assuming Congressional approval of the Compact of Free Association, which the President submitted to the Congress for approval on March 30, 1984, responsibility for decisions regarding resettlement will rest with the constitutional government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. However, provision is made in the Compact and in a related subsidiary agreement, for the Republic to request, and the United States to provide, technical assistance in this and related matters. In addition, the United States is committed to assisting the Bikinians with resettlement of their homeland when this becomes feasible. The Secretary of the Interior, therefore, desires to again consider the acceptability of Eneu for resettlement.

#### Other Factors:

1. The People of Bikini have filed in the United States District Court for the District of Hawaii (Secretaries Hodel and Clark are among the named defendants) to compel the United States to clean up and restore Bikini Atoll. Positive and responsible actions to provide relief to the Bikini people (resettling Eneu, for example) could well influence the progress and outcome of that suit.
2. The concerned Congressional committees have exhibited a strong interest in the plight of the Bikinians, and their perceptions of the administration's actions in this matter may be expected to influence action on the President's request for Compact approval.
3. The people of another atoll, Rongelap, were resettled in their home islands in 1957, three years after their relocation. As they have recently become more aware of the circumstances of their relocation and of their resettlement, they have attempted to draw a comparison between their atoll and Bikini atoll. In spite of assurances by U.S. officials and scientists, and in part under the influence of aggressive claims lawyers, they have concluded that they are being deliberately, or at least knowingly, placed at risk. Superficially, the radiological conditions at the residence island of Rongelap and at Eneu Island at Bikini are quite similar, with the difference, in fact, favoring Eneu. Recently, the people of Rongelap have expressed fear regarding their exposure to radiation hazards, and Marshall Islands Government officials have appealed to the United States Congress to authorize and fund their immediate relocation and resettlement. Disposition of the Eneu question will undoubtedly have an impact upon the Rongelap issue.

\*House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies.

sought to have a resettlement trust fund established as a part of the Compact approval. Again, the Enjebi question is similar to, and may be expected to be influenced by, U.S. actions regarding Eneu.

All of the above factors have entered into Congressional consideration of the Compact and have been the subject of recent exchanges in the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations.

#### The DOE Role:

Historically, the DOE and its predecessor organizations have provided technical advice, support, and assistance to those in authority in the Department of the Interior and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. As a practical matter, DOE's field personnel, including those in the contractor laboratories, have been looked to for advice by the resident peoples and their local government authorities. DOE representatives have tried to limit their advice to matters encompassed by their special knowledge and experience, but the complex interaction of cultural, social and economic considerations makes this difficult. In the instant case there is clearly no unique mathematical solution. Even the applicability of Federal radiation guidelines is not entirely straight-forward.

Further, when one looks at pathways and sources of radiation exposure, certain assumptions must be made as to lifestyle, availability of imported foods, etc. In fact, the composition of the assumed diet can alone at least double (or halve) the predicted radiation dose. And, finally, the degree to which a potential health risk is acceptable to the people themselves is a matter beyond the ken of DOE officials or scientists. Thus, we in DOE are faced with an obligation to do our best to inform the people themselves, and those to whom they entrust the power of decision, of the likely consequences of the various alternative courses of action, leaving the decisions to those whom the decisions affect. The Department of the Interior view seems to be that implicit in the Trusteeship is the obligation to make and carry out decisions affecting the health and safety of the Micronesian peoples. But as executive agent for the Trust, the DOI must rely upon technical advice from the DOE.

Consensus within the DOE staff will not be easy, for there are honest differences of opinion regarding both the role of DOE and the issue itself. The integrity of radiological safety standards, potential legal and financial liability, the cost of continued DOE involvement in the Marshalls, the relationship between this issue and the on-continent "down-wind" problems--are but some of the ramifications. In the face of these, DOE's recent advice has in general been conservative. Such conservatism, which ultimately has its price in freedom of action and in the people's right of self determination, deserves periodic reexamination.

The Secretary of the Interior has asked the Secretary of Energy for advice in these matters, and has specifically asked to be informed of what conditions, if any, should be imposed if the people of Bikini are relocated to Eneu Island. The requisite information is available to allow the formulation of such advice. It is recommended that the Secretary direct the staff to review this information and develop realistic options which might be available to the Secretary of the Interior.

### Postscript:

The DOE Marshall Islands program, responsibility for which currently rests with DP, is in need of Secretary level review and policy guidance. The matter addressed in this paper is but one facet of a DOE responsibility which is currently undergoing dramatic change.

The entire Marshall Islands program, small in dollar value but high in current visibility and political potential, is a legacy of the atmospheric nuclear test program in the Pacific (1946-1958). The committees most familiar with and most active in this Pacific area evidence their determination that the United States Government continue an active role in dealing with the environmental, medical, and radiological consequences of the test program.

On the other hand, the committees to which DP looks for authorization and appropriations have questioned continued funding for this program by DP. Taken literally, the Compact of Free Association, which is current Administration policy, would terminate DOE involvement. However, without a reasonable transition to smooth the transfer of responsibility, the likely result would be an abrupt diminution of technical services and support to the test-affected populations.

An early program review for the Secretary is recommended.

years that have passed since Assistant Secretary Clusen's letter, some of the uncertainties which then existed might have been resolved, and that at least some improvement might have occurred both in our knowledge and in the conditions which led to earlier recommendations.

to update the Department of Energy's evaluation and inform us what conditions, if any, should be imposed if the people of Bikini are relocated to Eneu Island in their home atoll.

Sincerely,

William Clark



United States  
OFFICE OF  
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Honorable Adrian P. Winkler  
High Commissioner  
Trust Territory of the  
Pacific Islands  
Saipan, Mariana Islands

Dear Mr. Winkler:

On May 15, 1979, Assistant  
replied to my letter of April  
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REPOSITORY PNNL  
COLLECTION Marshall Islands  
BOX No. 5690  
FOLDER Enewetak

**DOCUMENT DOES NOT CONTAIN ECI**

Reviewed by DJ Prisco Date 5/1/97