



A mirage in the desert?

The discovery, evaluation and development of the Olympic Dam ore body at Roxby Downs, South Australia, 1975–88

R. Keith Johns

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THE PUBLICATION

The occurrence of uranium in the Olympic Dam ore body ensured that the mine's development became a controversial and often emotional issue dominated by prejudice, ignorance and fear of the unfamiliar world of radiation.

This narrative provides historical insights on these and other issues with which the developers would have to contend – and which have relevance 35 years on from discovery: they include access and movement within the Woomera Prohibited Area; stratification of mining tenure within defined opal fields; Aboriginal mythology and sacred sites; and government policies that pertained to, and which culminated in November 1983 in the adoption of, a 'three mines uranium policy' and the prohibition of uranium conversion and enrichment, and the construction of nuclear power plants in Australia.

THE AUTHOR

With mentors such as Sir Douglas Mawson and Sir Ben Dickinson it is not surprising that the author took a keen interest in the subject of uranium throughout his career.

He travelled overseas with the Minister of Mines in 1976 to study Crown corporations, state participation in mineral development and aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle – along the way dispensing copies of the second interim report of the South Australian Uranium Enrichment Committee. Then, in 1980, with the Deputy Premier and Minister of Mines and Energy he inspected nuclear facilities in the UK, Holland, France and Sweden that served to confirm the benefits that would accrue from enriching uranium as this had the potential to treble the value of the product. He was Vice-Chairman of the South Australian Uranium Advisory Committee, reinstated in September 1984 and disbanded in March 1994.

His many publications covering geology, history and heritage include 'Uranium Exploration in South Australia' (1990) and 'Uranium in South Australia – Politics and Reality' (2005).



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