

Atomic tests

Author : Tim Sherratt

Tagged as : [atomic bomb](#), [atomic tests](#), [Emu Field](#), [Ernest Titterton](#), [Maralinga](#), [Monte Bello Islands](#), [Royal Commission](#)

Date : November 15, 1998

ATOMIC TESTING was undertaken in Australia between 1952 and 1963 as Britain sought to develop its own nuclear weapons. The Australian government readily supplied test sites and logistical support, mistakenly believing that greater access to nuclear technology would result.

Twelve full-scale nuclear devices were exploded in Australia at three sites, the Monte Bello Islands (1952, 1956), Emu Field (1953) and Maralinga (1956-8), with radioactively-dirty 'minor' trials continuing at Maralinga until 1963.

Opposition to the testing program grew throughout the 1950s with increased awareness of the dangers of radioactive fallout. This was heightened in the 1970s when the French began atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons in the Pacific. Lingering concern over health effects led eventually to the establishment of a Royal Commission into the British tests in 1984. The Commission examined safety precautions, and the 'black mist' that had reportedly engulfed aboriginal communities. It also questioned the role of Australian scientific observers, particularly the physicist Ernest Titterton.

The Royal Commission recommended easier access to compensation for servicemen and civilians, and that the test sites should be cleaned up at British cost, and returned to their aboriginal owners. After a long political and legal struggle, the clean-up proceeded and the land was returned to its owners, but some parts will never be safe for long-term occupation.

Robert Milliken's *No Conceivable Injury* (1986) provides a readable account of the tests and aftermath, while Lorna Arnold's official history of the tests, *A Very Special Relationship* (1987), plays down their health effects.

Share this:

- [Click to email this to a friend \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to print \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Twitter \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Google+ \(Opens in new window\)](#)
-

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).