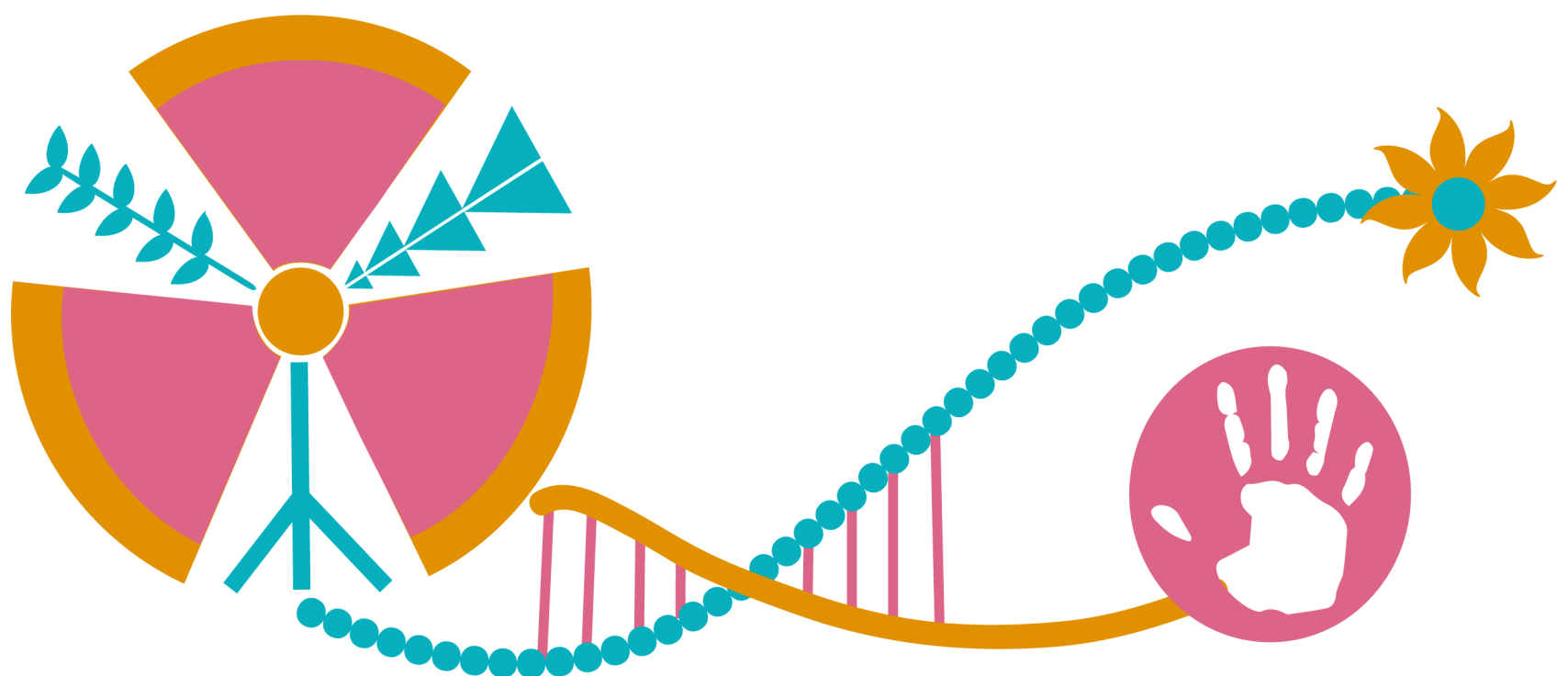


**THE NUCLEAR
TRUTH PROJECT
IN
CONVERSATION
JUNE 2024**

AUKUS BEYOND BORDERS



WHAT IS AUKUS?

AUKUS is a major nuclear and military alliance between three states - Australia, the UK and the US. It is a complex and significant arrangement - a military octopus with tentacles that reach far beyond the borders of the three states instigating this arrangement.

While we at the Nuclear Truth Project are primarily concerned with the nuclear aspects, in particular as this impact on communities, we also acknowledge the cross-cutting issues arising from the broader militarism. And with AUKUS there are many issues; the rise in nuclear war planning; the proliferation of nuclear technologies; increases in interoperability between states' militaries but led by nuclear armed states; and the inevitable intractable problem of long-lived nuclear and other military waste. There are significant economic concerns, misdirection of funds, geopolitical security challenges, questions of Indigenous sovereignty, workers and broader community health risks, collaborations through artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems, and a myriad of other issues.

In June 2024, people from across the world joined for a conversation about AUKUS as part of a series of event through the Nuclear Truth Project. Four speakers - Dave Sweeney (Australia), Teanau Tuiono (Aotearoa/New Zealand), Ray Acheson (USA) and Sam Fairbrother (UK) - shared their concerns about AUKUS with Dimity Hawkins, Pam Kingfisher and Rico Robertson from the Nuclear Truth Project. There were clear calls for international solidarity in combatting the rampant militarism.

This booklet captures extracts from the speakers in conversation with the Nuclear Truth Project. You can see more on the event through our website: nucleartruthproject.org.



A LITTLE MORE ON AUKUS

AUKUS has two “pillars”: **Pillar One** was first announced in September 2021: information, training and technologies being shared by the US and UK to Australia to acquire nuclear powered submarines. This includes supplying “secondhand” nuclear submarines from the US initially, and eventually enabling Australia build their own, using Highly Enriched Uranium. The current costs to Australia of the nuclear submarines alone is a staggering \$368 billion dollars - and counting. This would make Australia the only non-nuclear armed state to acquire nuclear powered submarines. It also creates some huge problems for Australia - having to build a new nuclear industry effectively from scratch, and ultimately being left with the significant challenges of high-level radioactive waste.

Pillar Two of AUKUS plans to enhance the joint capabilities and interoperability between the partners. The scope is massive, covering cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and additional undersea capabilities as well as hypersonic and counter hypersonic capabilities, electronic warfare, innovation, and information sharing. Pillar Two may draw in other partners to AUKUS. Currently both Japan and Aotearoa/New Zealand are actively considering their engagement.

LEARN MORE:

Troubled Waters: nuclear submarines, AUKUS and the NPT
ICAN Australia: [icanw.org.au/troubled-waters](https://www.icanw.org.au/troubled-waters)

Solidarity to Stop AUKUS by Ray Acheson
Counterpunch, April 2024
www.counterpunch.org/2024/04/21/solidarity-to-stop-aukus

The AUKUS Defence Ministers’ Joint Statement April 2024:
www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2024-04-09/aukus-defence-ministers-joint-statement



DAVE SWEENEY
• **AUSTRALIA**



“In mid September 2021 when AUKUS was announced, it emerged like a submarine itself. There was no movement, it was still water. And then one morning, the waters broke. I got calls at seven o'clock in the morning from people saying, “Hey, are you seeing this for a live press conference with those three leaders?” And that was the first any of us knew of it. Ever since then, it has remained cloaked in secrecy.”

“We see this as a Trojan horse to expanding, facilitating, empowering the nuclear industry, emboldening the nuclear industry everywhere.”

“It is creepy, controversial, costly, contaminating, and leading to vastly decreased security and options for regional and global peace.”

“first they bombed us...”

“It's important to note that Australian First Nations communities have literally spearheaded decades of community effective successful community and resistance to federal plans to impose radioactive waste dumps on their country. There's been multiple fights at multiple sites, particularly in Central Australia, and Northern Australia, around Federal plans. And I'd like to give a big shout out to those people who have led that resistance.

...There's a real concern amongst many First Nations people who were being targeted for domestic waste will be targeted for this international waste. We might even take the stuff from the Brits and the Yanks, as we say. And there's many people who are highly sensitised, and understandably and properly, to the lived experience and the continuing legacy of British nuclear weapons testing in this nation. And they're saying first they bombed us, then they ignored us. And now they put waste on us. There is a level of pain and concern, that is a level of overlay that is not needed, not wanted and justified, absolutely irresponsible.”

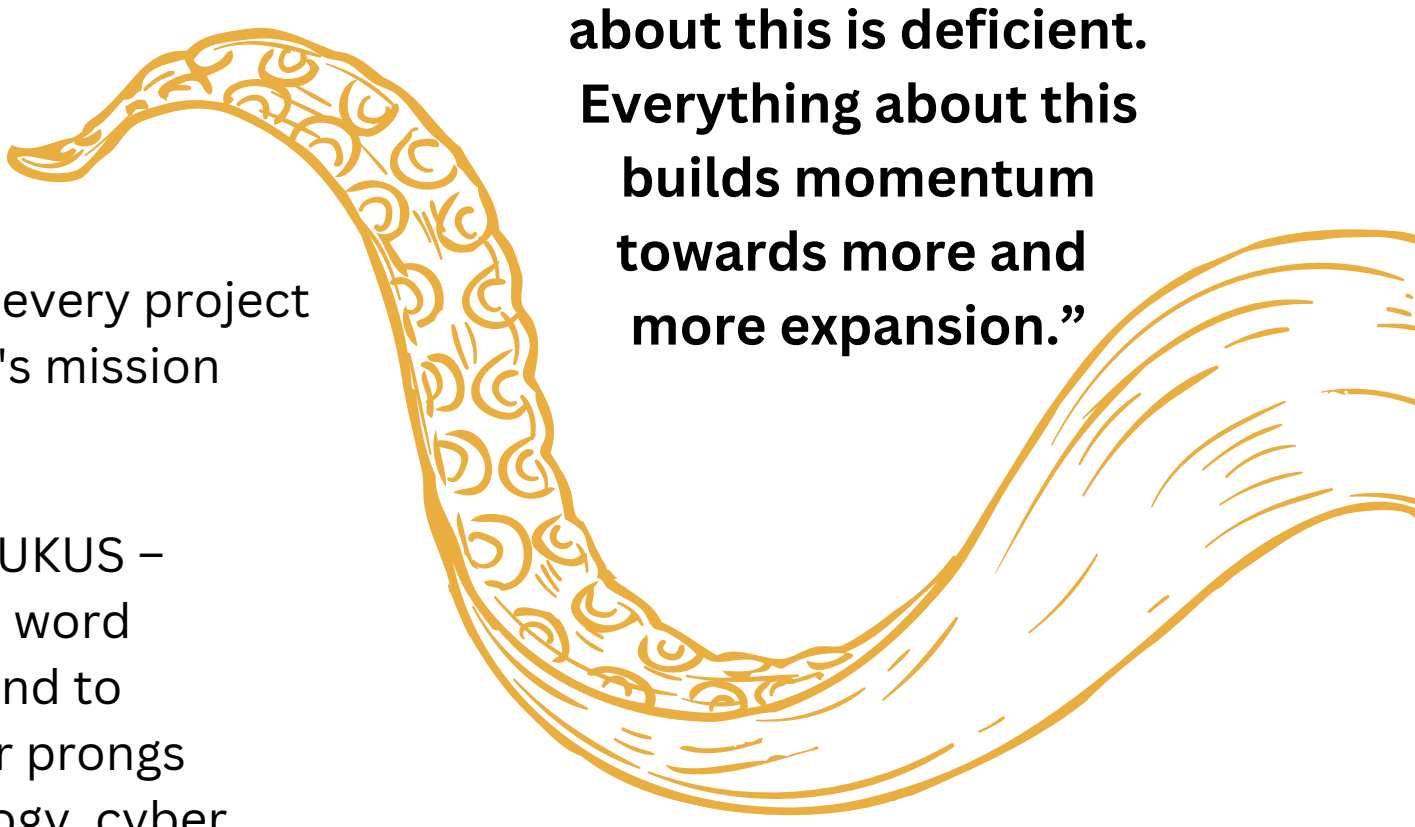
“The disturbing thing is as every project gathers momentum, there's mission creep.”

“The other dimension of AUKUS – and you’re right to use the word octopus, although it's unkind to octopus – is multiple other prongs around advanced technology, cyber capability, artificial intelligence, quantum technology, hypersonic capability, information sharing on sensitive technology elevated electronic warfare planning...
It is future war planning writ large.”

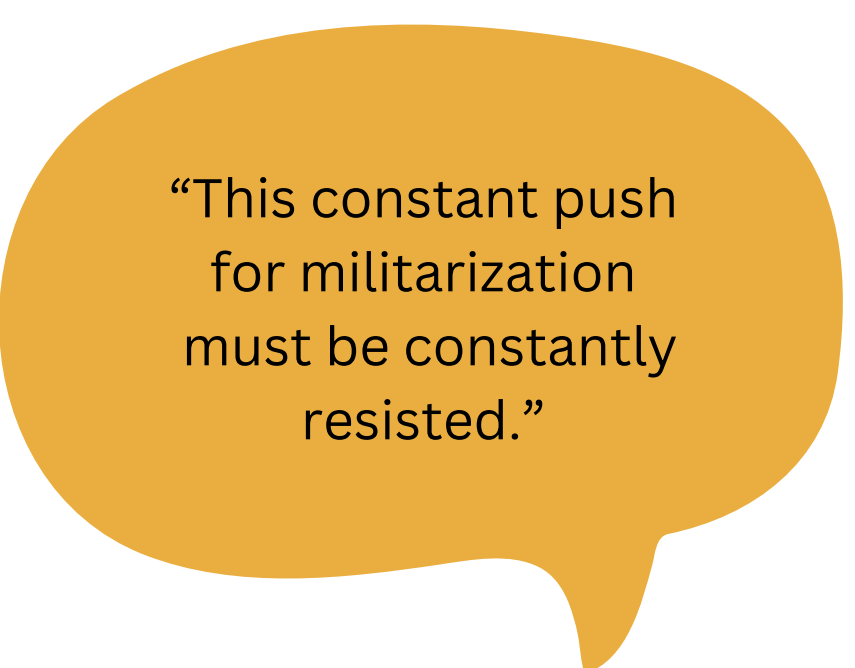
AUKUS and the nuclear ban?

“Activists in Australia have been saying, if you are serious, and you should be, about your commitment that this is not a precursor to nuclear weapons acquisition, facilitation or acceptance, you must sign the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. That's a way that you can assure our country, our region and our planet, that Australia is committed to a non-nuclear weapon future.

And to date, inexplicably and disappointingly, the Labour federal government which in opposition committed to do so, remains reluctant. It's not hostile. It remains on a policy platform committed to do so. But it is not operationalizing this with any sense of urgency. But at the same time, it is operationalizing AUKUS, with a vast sense of urgency.”



“Everything about this is political. Everything about this is deficient. Everything about this builds momentum towards more and more expansion.”



“This constant push for militarization must be constantly resisted.”

“So on one hand, we have a government that has a sense of urgency about advancing the AUKUS nuclear submarine program. On the other hand, same time, we have a sense of government that holds its hands on its heart and says we're committed to no nuclear weapons, but it's not signing the essential piece of paper that could show that commitment to our nation and to the world.”

TEANAU TUIONO
• AOTEAROA/NZ



“...start by acknowledging the elders, the activists who had been pushing for a nuclear free world, and particularly the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific...we walk in the footsteps of those that have gone before us.”

interoperability

“What it means, I think, is the ability for all these different militaries to actually plug in with each other. And if you start to plug in with each other, where does one part of the system begin? Where does the other part of the system end?”


climate change

“The other thing that really concerns me is this focus of bringing these nuclear submarines – when actually the existential threat facing the Pacific is climate change.

We've got \$360 billion plus everything else - a fraction of that money could do so much good in the Pacific.

The Pacific has been very clear for a very long time, at the Climate Change COPs, that the existential threat is climate change.

And yet we have the US, the UK and Australia putting all this money into nuclear powered submarines.”



“We do better ourselves when we work with the region in mind.”

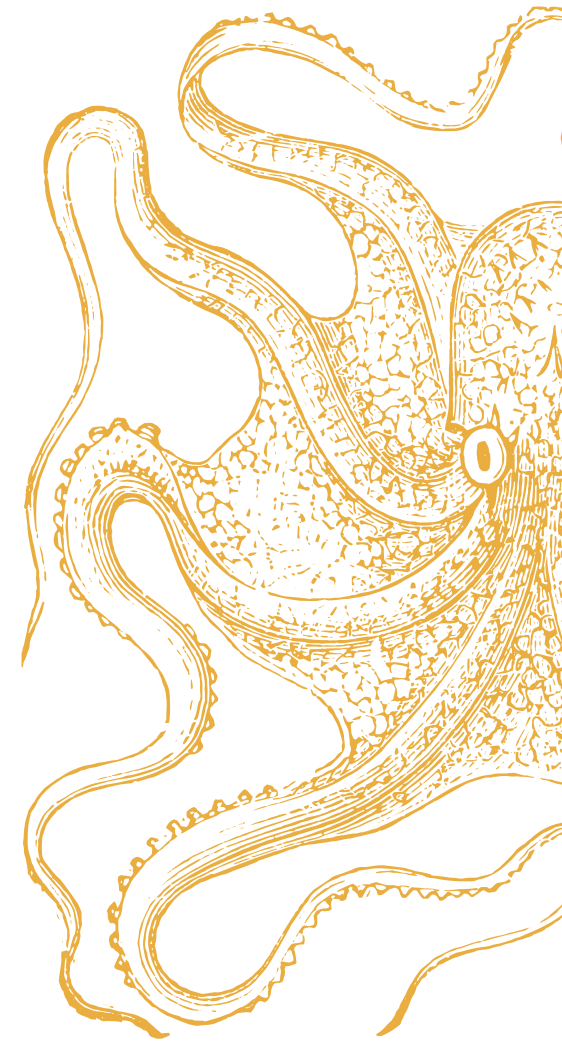
“Where (does) New Zealand get it’s diplomatic currency? When people see us on the international stage, what is Aotearoa New Zealand?”

They have influence in the Pacific.

Well you might lose that influence if you just do what the military powers tell you to do. Or if you're falling in lockstep. Why would anybody listen to us?

I think it's important for those countries to recognize that as our value within the Pacific.

And that is something that we ourselves here in Aotearoa New Zealand should aspire to - to step up to; to actually hold on to.”



the two pillars

“And just acknowledging what was said before around the problems around interoperability, because what we've been told is that these two things are completely different - but from what I heard, this could be used as a Trojan horse to do all of these other things which will contradict our own nuclear free stance, but also will trample on I think the legacy of those activists that have gone before us.

And it will also, in the case of New Zealand, move us more and further away from what we should have, which is an independent foreign policy stance.”

“We can't get into Pillar One because of our nuclear free legislation, they're trying to find other ways to hook us in. And so how do we look for the way that those connections are being made between New Zealand and Australia? And in the US and the UK? How do we spot that? What are the companies that are involved that are also involved here?”

But what I'm finding is, when we ask the questions, the answers are less than forthcoming...So it does require a lot of digging in, and trying to figure out exactly what's happening.”

RAY ACHESON

• **USA**



“The US National Defense Authorization Act 2024 gives permission to the US president to sell the submarines to Australia, but only if the US president can certify to Congress that the transfers will not degrade US capabilities, that the submarines will be used in line with US foreign policy and national security interests, and that the US is making sufficient investments to meet its own military requirements.”

“The nuclear powered submarines that Australia wants are going to be built at the exact same shipyards by the exact same companies using the exact same employees at the exact same time, as the US is building its nuclear armed submarines. So if Australia is giving over money that the US government has said has to be used in line with US national security interests and foreign policy interests, how does Australia determine which of the workers this money is going to in this shipyard where all of this stuff is being built collectively? So that's a real question, I think, for the Australian Government.”

“Regardless of whether the current Australian government has any intention of acquiring a nuclear weapon in the near future, it could be actually directly contributing to the US strategic nuclear force through this extremely bad deal that it's made.”

sovereignty

“The US government can say what Australian money is spent on, it can determine whether Australia receives any submarines at all, it will determine what those submarines are or are not used for. Australia's going to be paying billions and billions of dollars for the luxury of this relationship. And in the meantime, before any of this even happens, the US is going to get hundreds of Australian sailors embedded in its navy answering to the US military.”



“During this first phase of the AUKUS submarine acquisition plan, Australian sailors could actually be working on nuclear armed submarines. Because the US military has an official policy of Don't Ask Don't Tell about whether it has nuclear weapons on board its subs.”

“Australia is preparing to pour billions of dollars into this mess of a corrupt military industrial complex in the United States, and there's no guarantee it's ever going to get any nuclear submarines out of this deal, which, you know, is great for anti nuclear activists, but not so great for taxpayers in Australia, because all of your money is going towards absolutely nothing.”

“If you look at any recent record of US weapon production, you can really understand how every significant program has been beset by cost overruns. And massive delays.”

“As the government's own research service, the Congressional Research Service has pointed out, the US Navy doesn't actually have an excess of submarines, nuclear powered submarines, or even enough to meet its own plans, which is to deploy 66 of these types of submarines.

So to replace its own subs that it's been decommissioning and to meet its goal of its minimum force, the US needs to double its production rate.

To help with this, Australia has pledged to contribute at least four and a half billion Australian dollars (3 billion US dollars roughly) to accelerate production in the US shipyards. And then of course, it's given about the same amount to the UK to do this as well at the Rolls Royce nuclear reactor production line. So these payments are going to be made before either the US or the UK has sold Australia single submarine.”

“It makes zero sense to me why any foreign government would want to tether itself so completely to the foreign policy of this imploding empire.”

waste

“I think that the waste is a big thing that we've heard several times about. Wherever it's going to be imposed, it will not be accepted willingly by the local communities...

And I think we need to be aware, those of us, particularly in the US and the UK, of where that waste is going and how this violates First Nations rights, Land Back movements, how it relates to the broader environmental issues that we all care about and work on as well.”



SAM FAIRBROTHER

• UK



“There are lots of very complicated conversations going on about peace, and armaments and manufacture in the northwest of England at the moment.”

nuclear northwest

“The northwest of England is one of the poorest parts of the country. It is also where the first commercial nuclear power station was produced in the 1950s. It is where the vast majority of British arms manufacturing is produced. It's where Sellafield nuclear power nuclear processing plant the largest in the world is based and it is now home to the UK offices of a number of different manufacturing companies...”

“Two that have always been based here are of course BAE systems and Rolls Royce. Which is where nuclear submarine parts are made, and then assembled.”

“(in) the enormous contradictions of money and poverty in the wider economy of Britain – in minutes places, these contradictions are really being pushed on a personal and social level.”

“The underlying poverty of 14 years of conservative management of the British economy is now really starting to play out in the political landscape of how people are reacting to their lives and circumstances.”

“These are some of the poorest parts of the country in which BAE and Rolls Royce are providing effectively the only stable employment in the whole areas. And often one of those wage packets is maintaining the lives of large, extended families. These areas often have difficulties with substance abuse. Very few people are able to leave these areas. One in two children in some parts of Barrow now live in poverty.”



waste dumping

“In terms of waste, we currently have a big campaign to try to stop a big nuclear dumping site, just by Sellafield.”

“(It) makes me wonder to what extent the nuclear industry and the respective nation states that we're speaking from collude and also play us against each other, because we have it told that these that dumping site and Cumberland might be used for AUKUS material.”

“in terms of that nuclear waste, we have the same problem as well – of how that will relate to the water supply, settlement within arable land in the area. None of that has a public plan attached to it in terms of the dumping area.”

“All four of us here to speak on countries. Analysis, commitment to each other, and political action on complicated international issues like this allow us all to step beyond those political categorizations. And in that, I see future hope.”

“The difficulty is just that we are barely talking about this terrifying, terrifying project at all. I hope that we can continue to be speaking about it all, because frankly, we need some help up here.”



These excerpts were taken from a special session on AUKUS, part of the Nuclear Truth Project *In Conversation* events in 2024. Our speakers were:

Dave Sweeney: the nuclear free campaigner for the Australian Conservation Foundation and a co-founder of International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

Teanau Tuiono: a Green Party Parliamentarian in Aotearoa/New Zealand within the House of Representatives, and a long-term Indigenous rights and climate change activist. His roots are in both Cook Islands Māori and New Zealand Māori

Ray Acheson (they/them): the Director of Reaching Critical Will, the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and a writer and activist for the abolition of state violence.

Sam Fairbrother: a writer from the Mersey River Basin in North West England, the most nuclearised part of the UK. He is an active member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and founding member of the Commission for New and Old Art.

View the full event:
www.youtube.com/@NuclearTruthProject

about the Nuclear Truth Project

The Nuclear Truth Project is an international initiative connecting Indigenous and First Nations Peoples, affected community members, international and civil society organizations, experts and governments working for nuclear abolition.

Our Vision: the total elimination of nuclear weapons and associated nuclear harms. This includes redress and assistance for those who have been harmed, the remediation for the widespread health and ecological damage from past and present nuclear activities, and preventing future nuclear harms.

Our Mission: Our mission is to build support and political will to maintain momentum for our Vision by supporting Indigenous Peoples and affected communities with advocacy, education, and networking. This extends to educating the general public and governments about the harms of nuclear activities. We seek to engage people in local, national and international discussions about radioactive violence and how interrelated nuclear activities have and continue to affect their/our lives.

Our Goals: The overarching goals of the Nuclear Truth Project are to:

Educate – Document and demonstrate to people the genocidal nature of nuclear weapons and the harms that nuclear weapons and associated nuclear activities have caused and continue to cause;

Advocate – Build agency to empower people, including those who have suffered disproportionately and those who face nuclear annihilation;

Network – Build accountability and transparency measures to aid in the implementation and universalization of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and strengthen solidarity between and within nuclear impacted communities.

nucleartruthproject.org