

British nuclear tests at Maralinga

Between 1952 and 1963 the British Government, with the agreement and support of the Australian Government, carried out nuclear tests at three sites in Australia – the Monte Bello Islands off the Western Australian coast, and at Emu Field and Maralinga in South Australia. An official history of the tests (JL Symonds, *A History of British Atomic Tests in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra) was published by the Department of Resources and Energy in 1985.

Maralinga was developed as the permanent proving ground site, following a request of the British in 1954, and, after its completion in 1956, was the location of all trials conducted in Australia. It was developed as a joint facility with a shared funding arrangement. Following the two major trials (*Operation Buffalo* in 1956 and *Operation Antler* in 1957) there were a number of minor trials, assessment tests and experimental programs (dating from 1959) held at the range until 1963. Maralinga was officially closed following a clean-up operation (*Operation Brumby*) in 1967.

Records relating to Maralinga

Information about Maralinga is located in records created by a number of Commonwealth agencies. This information covers matters such as personnel who served in the area, security arrangements for the site, and technical and survey information (including meteorological reports).

Canberra

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|--|------------|---------------|
| <u>Identification cards of employees at the Maralinga atomic test site</u> | 1955–67 | A6242 |

Sydney

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|--|------------|---------------|
| <u>Original plans (negatives), (Defence and Weapons Research)</u> | 1940–61 | D1421 |
| <u>Correspondence files (Peace Officer Guard, Parafield)</u> | 1942–56 | D2569 |
| <u>Index and reference cards to surveys</u> | 1942–78 | D4461 |
| <u>Correspondence files (Long Range Weapon Establishment, Salisbury)</u> | 1947– | D174 |
| <u>Maralinga policy and administrative records</u> | 1947–83 | D4996 |
| <u>Maralinga reports, alphabetical series</u> | 1949–60 | D1767 |

| | | |
|---|---------|-------|
| <u>Drawings and maps relating to the Maralinga area</u> | 1951–69 | D2118 |
| <u>Maralinga Project Drawing Register</u> | 1954–55 | D4669 |
| <u>Copies of drawings and maps relating to the Maralinga area submitted to the Royal Commission</u> | 1955–69 | D4776 |
| <u>Computation books of Maralinga surveys</u> | 1957–78 | D5275 |

Photographic records, Sydney

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|--------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| <u>Aerial photographs</u> | 1955–60 | D4632 |
| <u>Aerial photographs</u> | 1965–69 | D4633 |
| <u>Maralinga photographs</u> | 1956 | D1826 |

Melbourne

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|---|------------|---------------|
| <u>Miscellaneous records relating mainly to atomic and long range weapons testing</u> | 1929–69 | M3881 |

Adelaide

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|--|------------|---------------|
| <u>Photographs, films, drawings & glass negatives – Maralinga area</u> | 1953–61 | D1768 |
| <u>Catalogue of drawings and maps relating to the Maralinga area</u> | 1954–83 | D2117 |

The Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia

In response to growing concerns about the safety standards observed during the conduct of the nuclear trials, especially with regard to measures taken to protect people from the exposure to ionising radiation, and the disposal of radioactive substances and toxic materials, the Australian Government established a Royal Commission in 1984 to inquire into these aspects of the tests. The Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s ([CA 3993](#)) gave considerable attention to the tests conducted in the Maralinga area.

Many of the records of the Royal Commission are publicly available, and may be viewed in the National Archives Canberra research centre. The most significant records are listed in the following table.

Collection references

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|--|------------|---------------|
| <u>Transcripts of proceedings</u> | 1984–85 | A6448 |
| <u>Statements received from United Kingdom witnesses</u> | 1985 | A6449 |
| <u>Statements received from Australian witnesses</u> | 1984–85 | A6450 |
| <u>Atomic Weapons Research Establishment Reports, 'Z' series</u> | 1984–85 | A6454 |

| | | |
|--|---------|-------|
| <u>Exhibits tendered before the Commission</u> | 1984–85 | A6455 |
| <u>Original agency records transferred to the Commission, 'R' series</u> | 1984–85 | A6456 |
| <u>Photographs relating to atomic tests</u> | 1985 | A6457 |
| <u>Maps of atomic test sites</u> | 1985 | A6458 |
| <u>Final report</u> | 1985 | A6460 |
| <u>Computer printout – list of exhibits</u> | 1985 | A6470 |
| <u>Computer printout – alphabetical index to witnesses</u> | 1984–85 | A6471 |
| <u>Computer printout – numerical list of items, 'R' series</u> | 1984–85 | A6472 |
| <u>Computer printout – numerical list of photographs</u> | 1985 | A6479 |
| <u>Computer printout – numerical list of maps</u> | 1985 | A6480 |
| <u>Computer printout – chronological list of newspaper articles of relevance to the Commission</u> | 1985 | A6482 |
| <u>Computer printout – keyword index to transcripts</u> | 1984–85 | A6483 |
| <u>Research team bibliography</u> | 1984–85 | A6584 |

Records relating to Indigenous Australians of the Maralinga area

The National Archives' guide *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Commonwealth records: A Guide to Records in the Australian Archives, ACT Regional Office* (compiled by Ros Fraser, AGPS, Canberra, 1993) includes references to records within the series listed above which relate specifically to Indigenous people of the Maralinga area and the effects of the testing on their lives. Check the term 'Maralinga' in the guide index to identify individual items.