

## Taiwanese Groups Protest Proposed Fukushima Water Dumping

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*Taiwanese environmental groups demonstrated in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in Taipei last Thursday to protest against a proposed plan by the Japanese government to dump 1.2 million tons of wastewater from the 2011 Fukushima disaster into the Pacific Ocean.*

The 2011 Fukushima disaster was caused by the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor after an earthquake and tsunami, devastating the coastline of Fukushima. The event was considered to be the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986. The plan to dump nuclear wastewater into the ocean came to the attention of many Taiwanese after it was reported by the media last month.

Among the groups involved in the recent protest were stalwarts of the anti-nuclear and environmental movement such as the Green Citizens' Action Alliance; Citizens of the Earth, Taiwan; Wild at Heart; the Green Party; and the Taiwan Renewable Energy Alliance. During the demonstration, groups presented a petition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, calling on it to urge the Japanese government not to go through with the plan. The Tsai Ing-wen administration has stated that it will talk with the Japanese government regarding the matter.

The groups cited the possible effects on the environment from the nuclear wastewater discharge, emphasizing their view that the effects on aquatic life could last for over forty years. This could include fish caught by fishing vessels that ends up being eaten by consumers in Taiwan, Japan, and other countries. The groups also emphasized that they were cooperating with Japanese civil society groups opposed to nuclear energy.

As in Japan, issues of what to do with nuclear waste have been a controversy for Taiwan as well. The most well-known example is the construction of a nuclear waste disposal facility on indigenous land on Orchid Island, also known as Lanyu. The indigenous residents of Orchid Island, the Tao, were told that the waste disposal facility was a canning facility.

Other plans to construct waste disposal facilities have met with local resistance. Advocates of nuclear energy in Taiwan have generally not helped matters. In an infamous incident, Hung Shih-hsiu, the organizer of the advocacy group Nuclear Mythbusters and a former assistant of former Nationalist Party Chairman and presidential candidate Hung Hsiu-chu, argued that every household in Taiwan should be given on a plastic bottle filled with nuclear waste in order to equally share the burden of this energy resource.

Hung Shih-hsiu debated Hung Sun-han of the Green Citizen Action Alliance, now a Democratic Progressive Party list legislator, before a 2018 referendum on whether or not Taiwan should scrap its goal of being nuclear-free by 2025. Though Taiwanese voted in favor of scrapping this goal in the referendum, they also voted against food imports from the radiation-affected Fukushima Prefecture, illustrating their concern. Notably, the Japanese government has been intent on promoting food exports from Fukushima and rebuilding tourism to the prefecture, and has made this a possible precondition for closer political and economic relations with Taiwan.

The environmental movement in Taiwan is generally opposed to nuclear energy. Nuclear energy is seen as dangerous for Taiwan, given its frequent seismic activity, leading to the possibility of a nuclear disaster similar to the Fukushima incident. Likewise, continual questions regarding nuclear waste disposal and mismanagement by state-run power utility Taipower have led to further questions.

That being said, pro-nuclear groups are increasingly visible at environmental protests against air pollution and global warming, although some have sought to distance themselves from Hung, who is Taiwan's most famous nuclear energy proponent.

Though it did not prevent reactor restarts from being quietly approved under the Tsai administration, the pan-Green camp has historically been more opposed to nuclear energy, while the pan-Blue camp has been more supportive. The pan-Blue camp has even sought to use the issue of nuclear energy to attack the Tsai administration in past years, claiming that nuclear energy is necessary to maintain a stable power supply in Taiwan—this despite the fact that only 8% of energy in Taiwan came from nuclear energy in 2017.

At any event, the Tsai administration is unlikely to take any strong stance on Fukushima wastewater, prioritizing stable relations with the Japanese government.

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