Three atolls in the Marshall Islands have brought claims for compensation for the effects of the US nuclear testing programme on themselves and their islands. Those claims have been heard by the specially established Nuclear Claims Tribunal in Majuro, RMI. The three populations have been waiting for more than 50 years for this acknowledgement of the pain and suffering they have endured.

Compensation claims against former colonising or commercial heavy-weight agencies are common in the Pacific. All the existing claims address the seizure of land without the local peoples’ agreement, together with the use (and destruction) of that land for the financial benefit of the outside agency. In the Marshall Island cases there is the added trauma of physical suffering from the effects of radiation from the nuclear tests fall-out.

Demands are now strident for proper clean-up of the residue of that radiation to ensured safety standards. This paper will examine those three pathways to compensation, land, health effects and clean-up, in order to ask whether money paid out to these long-suffering people can adequately compensate for those 50 years of hardship.

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