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Foreign Correspondent: Into the Zone

Airs Tuesday, May 24 at 9.30pm on ABC & iview

Mark Willacy travels to radiation-poisoned Fukushima to uncover startling new evidence about the dangers that still lurk there and the near insurmountable task of cleaning it up.

It's like a postcard of rural Japan... lush forests, waterfalls and bubbling streams; quaint villages where pink cherry blossoms festoon the streets.

But there's a grotesqueness here. Houses which rang with the sounds of life and laughter are being swallowed by weeds and vines; inside they are choked by cobwebs and dust.

This is the countryside of Fukushima. Five years after the nuclear meltdown, it remains full of radiation, and virtually empty of people.

"In the beginning I felt extremely lonely. But now I'm used to it." – Naoto Matsumura, a farmer who stayed put to care for abandoned animals – and who is described as Japan's most contaminated person.

In contrast the stricken Fukushima plant is thronging with activity. About 6500 courageous workers toil to contain the radiation but, as former Japan Correspondent Mark Willacy reports, it could scarcely be said that they are winning.

Willacy was one of the first journalists on the scene after the double headed tsunami and nuclear disaster in 2011, and has reported on it extensively since. Now he has been invited on a tour of the plant courtesy of the operator TEPCO.

"What's happening? They don't want to go any further." – Willacy with TEPCO guides as levels spike on the radiation meter

What Willacy discovers is truly unsettling.

The task of neutralising and retrieving hundreds of tonnes of melted nuclear fuel turns out to be far greater than previously thought. So too might be the eventual cost, as well as the time that will be required to remedy the site –that is, if it can ever be fully remedied.

"There's no playbook – they're making it up as they go along." – former US chief nuclear watchdog Gregory Jaczko

Mark Willacy interviews Naoto Kan, Japan's Prime Minister at the time of the crisis. He is a convert to the anti-nuclear cause and – along with Gregory Jaczko – a sceptic about whether the clean-up will succeed.

"There was a risk that half or all of Japan could have been destroyed. So in a way the accident took us to the brink of destruction." – Naoto Kan

“Into the Zone” - *Foreign Correspondent* 9.30pm Tuesday May 24 and 10.30am Thursday May 26 on ABC & iview; and 6.30pm Saturday May 28 on ABC News 24. Also on [iview](#).

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For further information contact:

Chris Chamberlin, News Publicist, ABC TV Publicity

02 83333 2154 | 0404 075 749 | chamberlin.chris@abc.net.au

[@popculturechris](#)