

## Talks on nuclear power

*The World Moves on apace.*

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The Westinghouse Electric Company, a manufacturer of nuclear power stations, has had talks with the Federal Government on "near-term opportunities".

The company also revealed it has been approached by Australian groups looking to establish nuclear power facilities.

Westinghouse communications consultant for nuclear power plants Scott Shaw said his company was supportive of the Howard Government's initiatives in the nuclear debate.

"Westinghouse is very supportive of Prime Minister Howard's initiatives in Australia and have been closely following events there," Mr Shaw said yesterday from his Pennsylvania office.

"Westinghouse recently visited Australia to discuss near-term opportunities with the Government and regulatory authorities.

"We have also had inquiries from individuals and/or groups within Australia pursuing the establishment and development of commercial nuclear power plants for electricity generation.

"While we applaud their interest in nuclear power, we have had no formal communication with any of these groups or individuals."

Westinghouse pioneered nuclear power plants, building the world's first commercial plant in the US in 1957.

The company, now majority-owned by Japan's Toshiba Corporation, began to intensify its marketing activity in Australia last October as a sponsor and presenter at the 15th Pacific Basin Nuclear Conference in Sydney.

However, it did not make a formal submission to, or consult, the Federal Government's review of nuclear energy chaired by Ziggy Switkowski.

In its presentation to the October conference, Westinghouse highlighted the specifications and functions of its flagship product, the AP1000 nuclear power plant.

Last month China's state-owned nuclear power company signed a deal to buy four AP1000 plants from Westinghouse.

The Australian Government last year paved the way for China to receive Australian uranium for power generation.

The world's leading suppliers of nuclear power hardware are positioning their businesses to win contracts from Australian nuclear power aspirants if the Federal Government removes the ban on nuclear generation.

A source close to Australian Nuclear Energy Pty Ltd – a company set up by prominent businessmen Ron Walker, Hugh Morgan and Robert Champion de Crespigny – said last month that it had held talks with another hardware provider, General Electric.

World demand for nuclear power technology is booming and prospective buyers of hardware from the likes of GE and Westinghouse may have to wait up to a decade before orders are filled.

The Switkowski report argued that the earliest nuclear electricity could be delivered to the Australian power grid would be about 2016.

Another nuclear power plant manufacturer likely to mount a pitch for Australian business in the future is Areva – a French-owned company.

Areva believes that Australia should consider nuclear power generation as a way of reducing greenhouse emissions.

Areva spokesman Charles Hufnagel said in an email the company's operations in Australia were limited to uranium mining exploration and electricity transmission services.

"Areva does believe nuclear is an interesting option for Australia, both in terms of economic and environmental advantages," he said.

"But we are aware this issue is today at a preliminary stage and that a political and democratic decision is the fundamental prerequisite before any contact between industrial groups."

Last week the National Australia Bank said it would lend funds for new nuclear plants only in "exceptional circumstances".