

## Beazley declares nuclear war – Australia

*Backward people!*

Queensland Sunday Mail  
May 24, 2006

KIM Beazley plans to fight the next election on nuclear energy by ruling out nuclear power stations in Australia as Labor also considers dumping its policy of no new uranium mines.

The Opposition Leader yesterday said that despite John Howard's belief that nuclear power was inevitable, there would be "no nuclear power in Australia under a Beazley government".

Senior Labor frontbenchers believe that while taking a stand on the most contentious and economically questionable aspect of the debate, Mr Beazley is moving towards backing the scrapping of the party's no-new-mines policy in favour of new safety protections surrounding overseas exports.

Mr Beazley's position signals three fronts in the nuclear debate – whether to expand Australia's uranium mines beyond three mines, whether to consider "value-added" exports such as uranium enrichment in Australia and whether to build nuclear power plants.

"The economics don't stack up. We have abundant sources of alternative energy, waste disposal issues are unresolved and there are important national security issues to be considered," Mr Beazley said.

There is already dispute within the Government over whether Australia should build nuclear power plants and the partyroom yesterday urged the Prime Minister's uranium taskforce also to consider Australia's responsibility for storing high-level nuclear waste.

Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane believes uranium enrichment plants could be operational in Australia within five years, which he admits highlights the need to consider how to treat the toxic waste.

Enriched uranium is a key component of many nuclear power plants and is much more valuable than the yellowcake Australia now exports for processing.

Acting Prime Minister Peter Costello warned yesterday that Australia would be a "mug" to ignore opportunities to expand uranium exports, but remained sceptical that nuclear energy was commercially viable yet.

"If it becomes commercial, we should have it. That is, there's no in-principle objection to nuclear energy," he said.

"(But) You'd be a mug if you had the opportunity to sell Australia's (uranium) and you didn't take it up. It'd be like leaving the iron ore in the ground or the gas in the ground."

In the Coalition partyroom, several Liberal MPs went further, calling for debate on the controversial option of Australia leasing nuclear fuel rods to the world and storing the waste – for a price.

Northern Territory MP Dave Tollner said Australia had the unique combination of geological and political stability and a responsibility as a "good global citizen".

"We can't be selling 40 per cent of the world's uranium without having some sort of interest in how nuclear waste is stored," he said. Previous attempts to establish even a low-level radioactive waste dump have sparked a community backlash.

However, West Australian Liberal MP Barry Haase said Australia should also consider storing high-level radioactive waste and was in the perfect position to "charge like a wounded bull for those services".

"I think we are internationally well placed to provide monitored storage of waste," he said.

Liberal MP Wilson Tuckey said Australia should consider a nuclear industry where "we lease the world fuel rods and charge a price that includes supervision and waste storage".

"We are the ideal repository for those spent fuel rods for the simple reason we have the best geological stability and we also have political stability," he said.

"I'd prefer to know it was in a safe repository in Australia."

Liberal MP Dennis Jensen, who disputes claims that a nuclear power plant was not yet economically viable, also backed the option of storing high-level waste. "There's probably hundreds of billions of dollars a year if we took all the world's waste but obviously it's something Australian society is going to have to grapple with and decide if they want," he said.

"With the technology that I think we should look at in Australia - the so-called Generation4 reactors - it will be cheaper again," Mr Jensen said.

Mr Howard is expected to announce a wide-ranging inquiry into nuclear issues after he returns from his overseas trip tomorrow. It would consider an expansion of uranium mining, as well as uranium enrichment in Australia and nuclear power.

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet officials confirmed to a Senate estimates hearing yesterday that an interdepartmental committee was established last year to consider the nuclear issue.

Another committee, called the Uranium Industry Framework Interdepartmental Committee, had representatives from a range of departments including finance, industry, the tax office, foreign affairs and trade, and education.

Mr Beazley's tough stand on nuclear power was issued as part of a joint statement with his resources spokesman, Martin Ferguson, who was advocating a debate on the issue last year.

"Australians are uncomfortable with the prospect of a nuclear nation under John Howard, and this is made worse by his refusal to clarify his plans," Mr Beazley and Mr Ferguson said.

This is a clear sign that Labor believes the nuclear industry is unpopular with the electorate.

However, Mr Howard said last week he believed nuclear power was inevitable.