

Premier warns off U-miners

The case of an unscrupulous politician using powers undemocratically.

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Premier Alan Carpenter has upped the ante in the uranium mining debate, vowing to introduce laws to stop companies mining the resource if they push the Government too far. Responding to statements by two WA companies that they would fight tooth and nail to mine lucrative reserves in the state's north, Mr Carpenter warned he would legislate to stop them, if needed.

"I have consistently said that mining and exporting uranium from WA equals WA importing the world's nuclear waste," Mr Carpenter told The Sunday Times. "I will not risk WA becoming the world's radioactive waste dump. I have also repeatedly said that the mining companies know my Government's policy. It is clearly enunciated and understood. The mining industry understands this position and does not want to force my Government into introducing legislation. I have also repeatedly said that if we have to introduce relevant legislation, we will. Our legal advice shows that we are in a very strong position."

State laws ban the dumping of nuclear waste from Australian and international sources, but there is no law banning uranium mining.

Paladin Resources Ltd and Nova Energy Ltd, which were granted mining leases in the late 1970s, say they want to mine their uranium deposits in the next six years. Nova, which estimates the value of its uranium resources at Lake Way and Centipede in central WA at \$1.1 billion, intends to complete a feasibility study into mining the deposits by 2008 and hopes to start mining a year later. Frustrated at a lack of opportunities in WA, managing director Tim Sugden said Nova would commit a large portion of exploration money to jurisdictions where policies supported uranium mining, such as the Northern Territory, South Australia and Africa, where the company had acquired prospects in Guinea. Paladin has been forced to put its money into starting a uranium mine in Namibia, where mining is expected to begin in September. Paladin boss John Borshoff said his company would love to mine uranium at Maningingee, near Onslow, but the Government's anti-uranium mining policy would be an obstacle. He could not rule out multimillion-dollar compensation claims against the Government if it stopped Paladin from mining its uranium reserves.

"Before it used to be the Cold War and the Russian proliferation, but now that's gone and it's terrorism and waste disposal that are being used as excuses (not to mine uranium)," Mr Borshoff said. "In other parts of the world it is all systems go, yet in WA we are holding back. What sort of genius has this mob got that the rest of the world, that is so power starved, hasn't?"

Federal Resources Minister Ian Macfarlane said Mr Carpenter's argument that WA would become a nuclear-waste dump if it allowed mining was "wafer thin. I am not sure how much longer the Government can continue to explain to West Australians that Labor thinks it's OK for South Australia to make millions through the export of uranium, but cross a border and they suddenly change their minds," Mr Macfarlane said. "Mining, but . . . there is every indication the Labor Party will overturn its nonsensical policy next year."

