

Australia to hold nuclear power review

Australia would be foolish not to use its wealth

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Australia's Prime Minister John Howard has announced a study into whether the country should develop nuclear power.

Experts will assess whether Australia should shift some of its energy production from coal and gas to nuclear energy, which it has so far shunned. The panel will present a report to the government by the end of the year, Mr Howard said.

Australia holds 40% of the world's known uranium reserves and recently signed an export deal with China.

"Cabinet has approved the establishment of a prime ministerial task force to review uranium mining, processing and nuclear energy in Australia," Mr Howard told journalists. The inquiry would address whether it was "economically feasible to contemplate the establishment of nuclear power stations in this country", he said.

Mr Howard said the private sector would be responsible for building power stations, not the government.

The move is likely to spark considerable debate in Australia, both over environmental issues and over its effect on Australia's regional ties.