

Beazley change on uranium divides Labor

New policies for new times.

Perth Now
July 26, 2006

Opposition Leader Kim Beazley's U-turn on uranium mines is dividing the Labor Party.

After months of internal party debate, Mr Beazley has announced he wants to dump Labor's 22-year-old policy of opposing any new uranium mines.

He wants next year's national conference to endorse a new party platform, which would impose stringent safeguards on uranium use and exports, but allow new mines to open.

Opposition environment spokesman Anthony Albanese has already come out strongly against the plan, as has the ALP's former national president Carmen Lawrence.

Labor frontbencher and former anti-nuclear campaigner Peter Garrett has added his dissent.

But opposition resources spokesman Martin Ferguson, industry spokesman Stephen Smith and union leader Bill Shorten have backed the change.

West Australian Premier Alan Carpenter said he will not allow uranium mining in his state, but Northern Territory Chief Minister Clare Martin said she will support new uranium mines in the territory, reversing her previous position.

Under Mr Beazley's plan, the party would continue to oppose nuclear power, uranium processing, and reprocessing in Australia, as well as the importation of high-level nuclear waste for storage here.

Labor introduced its policy in 1984 to confine uranium production to three mines.

Mr Beazley said he expects a "spirited discussion" within Labor ranks about scrapping it.