

Aussie uranium set to boost China

The rest of the world better get in line.

AFP

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Australia could start exporting uranium to China within months and expects to corner about a third of the market for Beijing's giant nuclear power program, a senior official said yesterday.

Australia could earn A\$250 million (US\$187 million) a year from the deal, Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office director-general John Carlson told a Senate committee.

The committee is looking into treaties covering the export of the nuclear material signed earlier this year after Canberra said it had secured safeguards from Beijing ensuring that the fuel would not be used in weapons.

"In principle, we could have uranium going into China in the first half of next year, but that's speculative," Carlson said. "But no material can actually be transferred into China until the agreements are in place. We hope that that will all be in place by the end of the year."

"How quickly uranium then transfers into China really depends on commercial arrangements and whether the uranium bought will be processed in other countries before going into China," he said.

China has announced plans to build 28 new nuclear reactors, and by 2020 the annual uranium requirement would be about 8,000 tonnes a year, almost as big as Australia's current uranium output, Carlson said.

Australia, which has the world's largest known reserves of the nuclear fuel, could hope to provide about one-third of that, he said.

There would be no direct Australian involvement in inspections of China's nuclear facilities and stores as that would be up to the International Atomic Energy Agency, he said.