

Prime Minister Howard backs nuclear power in Australia

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PRIME Minister John Howard yesterday gave his strongest support yet to the use of nuclear power in Australia.

An expert taskforce will release a draft report next month on the merits of nuclear power and if Australia should be thinking of value-adding options, such as enrichment, for its vast uranium stores.

Before the experts have their say, Mr Howard indicated he believed nuclear power was an industry Australia should develop.

He previously had suggested nuclear power was something Australia should consider if economically viable. "I'm in favour of Australia developing nuclear power for peaceful purposes," he said yesterday.

"It's clean and green and, in an age where we're worried about global warming, we should be looking seriously at nuclear power as an option because it's clean and it doesn't emit greenhouse gases.

"I can't understand why the extreme greenies oppose it."

Mr Howard's one-time adversary, former prime minister Paul Keating, saw the issue completely differently.

"Nuclear energy is a bad fuel, a dirty fuel, a dangerous fuel," he said. "Nuclear is a no-no generally, in my opinion. It is a bad business."

Mr Keating would prefer to focus on other strategies to reduce Australia's reliance on fossil fuels, options such as hybrid cars and hydrogen fuel cells.

Labor pledged there would be no nuclear power if it won government but it did plan to re-examine its policy of no new uranium mines at its national conference next year.

Opposition Leader Kim Beazley wanted the policy changed but faced a difficult job convincing some sections of Labor that that was the way to go.