

Australia to export uranium to China

This is the implementation of a pact earlier this year.

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Australia will sell uranium to China starting next year under an export deal approved yesterday by a parliamentary committee that ensured international safeguards would be met.

Australia, which holds 40 per cent of the world's recoverable uranium, reached agreement in April to begin exporting uranium to China, a move that should double annual revenue from exports of the nuclear fuel to US\$1 billion.

Lawmakers on the parliamentary treaty committee, who needed to approve the deal, concluded it was in Australia's national interest.

China is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"The safeguards agreement offers adequate assurance that China will use Australian uranium and technology for peaceful purposes only," committee Chairman Andrew Southcott said.

Some experts expect China's nuclear power generating capacity to increase eightfold over the next 25 years.

"Estimates available to the committee suggest that, at a current price of 100 dollars (US\$78) a kilogram, with Australia selling an estimated 2,500 tons of uranium to China, this would earn Australia 250 million dollars a year," Southcott said.

China, with a huge appetite for energy, is banking on nuclear power to meet its needs and cut greenhouse emissions from fossil fuels.

Despite its huge reserves, Australia accounts for only 23 percent of global uranium production, in part because of mining bans associated with fears over the safety of nuclear waste and proliferation.