

PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen: You will have read and heard lately, expressions of concern about the world's resources of energy producing minerals. The rise in oil prices around the world has dislocated economies everywhere.

Australia has enormous resources of coal and over several years of exploration and endeavour, we had reached 70% self-sufficiency in oil needs. Because of the neglect of the former Administration, this proportion has begun to decline.

Nevertheless, Australia, compared with countries of the Northern Hemisphere, is still comparatively well off. That does not mean that the Government is not active.

I have asked the Minister for National Resources, Mr Anthony, to prepare a study of the nation's energy requirements and resources as a basis for the policy decisions that obviously will have to be made. That paper will cover resources, the impact of developing technology, and the nature of research programmes being carried out with Government funds.

I have also asked Mr Anthony and the Minister for Science, Senator Webster to cooperate in another study on solar energy research and development, for, as well as coal, Australia has plenty of sunshine - although not perhaps in Wannon during some of the winter months.

Apart from our own survey, we are also looking into the possibility of inviting the United States to engage in a cooperative programme of research into solar energy.

There is another asset which Australia also has in enormous quantities. We have about 20% of the Western world's known quantities, and readily available resources of uranium. At the time of a world energy shortage, that fact gives Australia a global responsibility.

Our policies in this area are waiting on the Second and Final Report of Mr Justice Fox's Environmental Inquiry on Uranium Mining. We expect that Second Report to be ready early next month.

Despite the fact that the Government's uranium development policy remains undecided whilst we wait for the final Fox Report, the Government has seen from the moment it took office the need to examine carefully the question of safeguards on exports of uranium, and the need to support nuclear non-proliferation.

After his report is completed Mr Justice Fox will be travelling overseas. I have asked him - and he has agreed - to pursue inquiries relating to non-proliferation and to report to me personally on his return. I will regard his advise as important in enabling the Government to pursue the most effective policy against proliferation which is a matter of great international concern no matter what the final report on the mining of uranium.

Soon after President Carter took office I wrote to him giving him strong assurances of support for strengthened nuclear non-proliferation. These same assurances were also sent to the Canadian Prime Minister, Mr Trudeau.

I assured President Carter that we shared their concerns about the need to support fully the objective of strengthening nuclear non-proliferation. I informed him that we were aware of the new thinking that was going on internationally on the need for adequate controls of the nuclear industry and that Australia would be requiring stringent controls on any uranium or nuclear material supplied from Australia.

I stressed that our final decisions would only be taken in the light of the full reports of Mr Justice Fox's Inquiry.

President Carter responded warmly, saying he was glad to get my letter of support as he was deeply concerned over the implications of further nuclear weapons proliferation for our common security and well-being.

President Carter noted that Australia's potential as a major supplier of uranium gave Australia a particular interest in the desire to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation and that Australia could play a vital role with the United States and Canada in reducing the dangers.

President Carter sought to have further consultations with Australia. Since that exchange of correspondence, he announced his Administration's new nuclear policy which is aimed at strengthening nuclear non-proliferation. Senior officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and National Resources are now in Washington having discussions with the Administration about the U.S. Nuclear Policy which President Carter announced on April 7.

In any event, we would only export uranium with the most stringent and comprehensive safeguards, and strictly for peaceful non-military purposes. Exports of uranium under these conditions of tight control and international surveillance, would strengthen rather than weaken non-proliferation objectives and so prevent further spread of nuclear weapons. Countries that are relying on nuclear power receiving adequate supplies of uranium are more likely to postpone the use of plutonium as a nuclear fuel.

Whilst awaiting the Final Report of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry, the Government has been investigating and developing the best and most effective safeguards to apply to any future exports of uranium. Your Government is aware of its obligations and responsibilities, and will not fail them.