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PRIME MINISTER

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MR WHITLAM'S NATIONAL BROADCAST ON URANIUM

The Leader of the Opposition last night made a National Broadcast about Australia's decision on uranium which was dishonest and deceptive. It misleads the Australian public and provokes division within the community. It contains selective quotation and misrepresentation.

Mr Whitlam said that the Government's decision commits Australia to the export of uranium regardless of the lack of international controls to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and to reduce the risks of nuclear war. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Government's policy on nuclear safeguards, announced by me on 24 May and described in detail in the material explaining the Government's decisions of 25 August, will ensure the application of the most stringent nuclear safeguards to Australian uranium. That policy goes beyond the recommendations of the Ranger Inquiry in:

. The requirement for International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards on any nuclear material supplied by Australia to existing nuclear weapon states.

. The requirements for prior Australian consent to
- high enrichment
- reprocessing
of nuclear materials supplied by Australia

- . The requirement for assurances of adequate physical security
- . The requirement for a clause in contracts noting that transactions are subject to Australia's safeguard requirements.

But the Government is not complacent; it will be going further. As I have already announced, the Government will investigate areas in which Australia could assist the International Atomic Energy Agency. The Government will act with other suppliers to ensure that nuclear safeguards are effective and are kept under review and improvement.

Mr Whitlam claims that the Australian Government has committed itself to supplying uranium before any of the customer countries have committed themselves to safeguards. This is a gross misrepresentation. The Government has decided that the mining of Australian uranium should proceed but with exports permitted only to countries that accept safeguards of our standard. Non-nuclear weapon states who wish to import our uranium must be parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, involving International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Existing nuclear weapon states must agree that Australian uranium will not be used for military or explosive purposes and will be covered by International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Mr Whitlam again misrepresents the facts when he says it does not make sense to play the game before the other side has agreed to stick to the rules. The Government's position is precisely that we will not authorise the sale of uranium unless customers fully accept our safeguards requirements.

They will be required to enter into a binding bilateral agreement on those requirements before any Australian uranium is exported to them.

The Ranger Inquiry says "the dangers of proliferation are very serious. They affect the whole world and exist whether or not Australia makes its uranium available to other countries" It is quite clear that Australia's place in advancing the cause of non-proliferation, in furthering development of stringent safeguards, and in contributing to studies aimed at reducing the risks of proliferation - such as the International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation will be very much less if Australia decides to wait for ten or twenty years before making a decision on the export of uranium.

Again, when Mr Whitlam says that the export of Australian uranium would increase the amount of man-made nuclear waste, he is misleading. Countries requiring uranium for peaceful purposes - to heat homes and to provide jobs - will acquire that uranium from other sources. Those other sources may be less concerned than Australia is about the risks of proliferation and may not require the stringent safeguards that Australia does. Mr Whitlam's proposal that we delay a decision about uranium would do nothing about the amount of nuclear waste in the world, could increase the costs of power generation in energy-poor countries and, indeed, could increase risks of nuclear proliferation.

Mr Whitlam causes further confusion when he refers to the application of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards in the Euratom countries. The plain fact is that, under its nuclear safeguards policy, the Government will not agree to the supply of Australian uranium unless it is covered by International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards from the time it leaves Australian ownership. Pending the completion of subsidiary arrangements with

Euratom countries, the International Atomic Energy Agency is empowered to make ad hoc inspections, and is already doing so.

Mr Whitlam misleads again when he says that the United States cannot account for some 8000 pounds of nuclear material. The United States' Nuclear Regulatory Commission has stated that there has never been an unresolved case of enough "Material Unaccounted For" to make a bomb. "Material Unaccounted For" is not necessarily a result of diversion but is usually the result of the limits of precision of analysis and of operating losses such as deposits on pipes and filters.

Mr Whitlam misuses statements by the Ranger Inquiry, by me and by the Minister for Environment, Housing and Community Development when he talks about the disposal of nuclear waste. Let me be clear. The technology for handling high-level radioactive liquid wastes exists and is proven. The technology for the solidification and vitrification of those wastes into a form suitable for ultimate disposal exists and is being developed on a commercial scale.

Mr Whitlam makes a spurious and dishonest comparison between the safe storage of nuclear waste and the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons. There are no proposals by other countries that we should store their nuclear waste. Mr Whitlam is ignoring the concern of other Governments - in Japan, in Europe, in the developing countries - for the welfare of their people and the well-being of their environments. Mr Whitlam, having made a show of examining his own conscience, is now trying to act as the conscience of the world. The price he would pay would be to reduce Australia's effectiveness in international forums concerned with nuclear proliferation and waste disposal.

Mr Whitlam's course is a gesture to protesters at home. The Government's course is constructive and internationally responsible.

Mr Whitlam dismisses the economic significance of exporting uranium. He says the export income, royalties, jobs will not begin for five or even ten years and so, he says, the decision is irrelevant to Australia's current economic problems. This illustrates the myopic and blinkered attitude of the Opposition. Mr Whitlam ignores the benefits - the jobs - that will result from the construction works at the mines; these are not five to ten years hence. However, most seriously of all, he ignores the fact that in five years time Australia will be facing economic problems if it does not have additional export income, not least to pay for additional imports of oil. Mr Whitlam would not only have us deny other countries the energy they need, he would have us, too, out of work and shivering in the cold as energy costs mount. That is only to be expected from the leader of a Party which, in Government, brought exploration for oil in Australia to a halt. Mr Whitlam ignores the totality of our energy needs. The Government does not.

Mr Whitlam says the Ranger Inquiry favoured a delay of several years in the decision about supplying Australia's uranium. This is untrue. The Ranger Inquiry said on page 5 of its Second Report that "a decision on the options (to delay or not to delay) depended largely on what was deemed to be the best strategy in relation to the matter of proliferation". The Government took its decision with full regard for advancing the cause of non-proliferation. President Carter's initiatives, the International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation, and recent deepening in international concerns about proliferation make this the most propitious time for Australia to make its decision.

It is significant that throughout his broadcast speech, Mr Whitlam referred to the Ranger Inquiry as the "Fox Commission". Mr Whitlam ignores the fact that Mr Justice Fox for whom the Government has the highest esteem - was one of three Commissioners; the other two were Mr G.G. Kelleher and Professor C.B. Kerr. The Ranger Inquiry's recommendations were unanimous. The Government gave careful and lengthy consideration to those recommendations. It arrived at its decisions on them after consideration of other relevant factors, including international developments in non-proliferation. The Government explained its decisions fully and honestly to the Australian people. Unlike the Opposition, it has explained its decisions consistently.

Finally, I reiterate what I placed on public record on 25 August:

"The Government's decision was taken on the basis of the Inquiry's principal findings and recommendations.

"On uranium mining, the Inquiry concluded:

'The hazards of mining and milling uranium, if those activities are properly regulated and controlled, are not such as to justify a decision not to develop Australian uranium mines.'

The Government is now satisfied that the environmental control and industrial health measures proposed by the Inquiry and accepted by the Government, will provide proper regulation and control.

"On nuclear power reactors, the Inquiry concluded:

'The hazards involved in the ordinary operations of nuclear power reactors, if those operations are properly regulated and controlled, are not such as to justify a decision not to mine and sell Australian uranium.'

This is in accordance with the Government's own view.

"On waste disposal from nuclear power stations, the Inquiry concluded:

'While we do not think that the waste situation is at present such as to justify Australia wholly refusing to export uranium, it is plain that the situation demands careful watching, and depending on developments, regular and frequent reassessment.' The Government is satisfied that the technology exists for the safe management and ultimate disposal of highly radioactive waste. International developments will continue to be closely reviewed and Australia will continue to participate in international studies directed to improve standards for waste disposal.

"On the possibility of nuclear terrorism, the Inquiry concluded:

'In our view, the possibility of nuclear terrorism merits energetic consideration and action at the international level. We do not believe that this risk alone constitutes a sufficient reason for Australia declining to supply uranium. It does, however, provide a further reason why the export of our uranium, including what is proposed to be done with it, and where, are matters which the Government should keep under constant scrutiny and control.'

The Government is satisfied that the specification of standards of physical security by the International Atomic Energy Agency constitutes the basis upon which national governments can provide strong protection against nuclear terrorism.

"On Australia's international obligations, the Inquiry concluded:

'A total refusal to supply would place Australia in clear breach of Article IV of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and could adversely affect its relation to countries which are parties to the N.P.T..'

Article IV of the Treaty obliges Australia to co-operate in the

production and usage of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The export by Australia of uranium under stringent safeguards would give effect to our obligations under Articles III and IV of the Treaty"

CANBERRA

5 September 1977