



PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

The Government's decision to continue with the mining and export of uranium for peaceful purposes - announced last year - was taken only after months of exhaustive examination.

Because of our vast uranium reserves, we made it clear that as a nation we had special responsibilities. We had responsibilities to protect the environment and the interests of the Aboriginal people in Northern Australia, and we also had an international responsibility.

The Government has stressed that there was no way we would not maintain our firm stand in meeting in full each of these obligations. Australians, and the world community, know that.

Some events in recent days have again focussed attention on Australia's position in these three critical areas. I want to re-iterate, and make the point stronger than ever, that our promises and our commitment on these questions remain absolute.

Nuclear proliferation - the spread of a capacity to manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons - is something that concerns people throughout the world.

Australia, as a nation, has the capacity to strengthen the international regime of controls and incentives preventing countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. We can and are doing this by setting an example through our own acceptance of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the I.A.E.A. safeguards on nuclear activities.

The stringent safeguards policy I announced last year demonstrates the Government's concern and sets conditions for the supply of our own uranium to other countries as firm and stringent as those adopted by any nuclear supplier country.

I have made the point on a number of occasions: those requirements will not be reduced or weakened. This will allow Australia's uranium help meet the world's energy needs, and strengthen the non-proliferation regime.

As a uranium exporter we will exert considerable influence in international nuclear forums concerned with non-proliferation. My Government is very aware of the obligations this places upon us. We will not compromise our safeguards policy for commercial advantage. Equally, those safeguards will be applied without discrimination.

We must be sure that the world's needs for nuclear energy are met without encouraging the destabilising force of nuclear weapons proliferation.

The Government is actively negotiating safeguard agreements with other countries and working on international initiatives, such as the International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation, which is a major new world endeavour to find ways to meet national needs for energy, consistent with non-proliferation.

The Government has also committed Australia to active participation in current negotiations on a new international convention on physical security in the nuclear field. Australia has accepted the rules on nuclear exports developed by the Nuclear Suppliers Group which brings together the world's major nuclear supplier countries.

Initiatives such as these are complementary. Above all, they are designed to support the major international objective of a safer and more stable world.

Within Australia, our commitment to full environmental protection remains firm. Legislation recently introduced into the Federal Parliament sets out to make sure that the nuclear industry in Australia is regulated to give the utmost protection to people and the environment. We seek a uniform code of protection in all States and Territories following consultation with them.

The Government has already announced that a supervising scientist will oversee all research programs connected with the protection of the Alligators River Region in the Northern Territory. This scientist, directly responsible to the Government, will also advise on the specific environmental requirements for the Ranger project, and any uranium project in the Region.

On top of that, the Government will set up a Research Institute to help develop programs necessary for protection of the Region's environment. These programs will be co-ordinated by a committee that will not only represent the mining companies and various governments, but also the Northern Land Council representing the Aboriginal people of the Region.

Of course, the Aboriginal people are vitally involved in any decisions taken in relation to the mining of uranium. Almost all the known uranium prospects in the Northern Territory are on land which is or is likely soon to be Aboriginal land.

I have already assured the Aboriginal people that no mining interests will be granted in Stage 2 of the Region until Aboriginal land claims are dealt with.

In the case of Ranger, the Government, having regard to the recommendations of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry, decided the project should go ahead.

The Government has accepted the recommendations of that Inquiry that special programs be developed to minimise the social impact of uranium mining on the 800 or so Aboriginals who live in the Region.

Many Aboriginals have expressed a wish to return to some of their traditional land to live. The Government supports this wish.

Our commitments to the Aboriginal people, to the environment, and our international responsibilities to help make a safer world are being met.

Our promise has been met with performance.

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