



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

COMMITTEES

Environment and Energy Committee

Report

SPEECH

Wednesday, 5 February 2020

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 5 February 2020 Page 82 Questioner Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (16:56): On behalf of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy, I present the committee's report, incorporating dissenting reports, entitled, *Not without your approval: a way forward for nuclear technology in Australia*, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Report made a parliamentary paper in accordance with standing order 39(e).

Mr TED O'BRIEN: by leave—I am pleased to present to the House a report entitled *Not without your approval: a way forward for nuclear technology in Australia*. This is a report of the House Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy. We all know that energy is one very hotly contested area of public policy in Australia as we transition to a system that is delivering affordable and reliable electricity while also reducing emissions. This is no easy feat and it requires a preparedness to consider all types of technologies, including nuclear technology.

The conclusions reached by the majority of this committee gave rise to three recommendations; firstly, that nuclear energy be considered as part of Australia's future energy mix. I underscore two words there: 'considered' and 'future'. To be clear, we are not recommending that Australia races ahead and adopts nuclear energy; rather, that this zero-emissions baseload technology that accounts for around 11 per cent of the world's electricity generation be put on the table for fair consideration as part of our future energy mix post-2030.

Secondly, we recommend a body of work be undertaken, including an economic assessment, technological assessment and readiness assessment—assessments that have never been done before in the Australian context—as well as a two-way engagement program with the Australian public, recognising the importance of a social licence for any successful management of a civil nuclear program.

Thirdly, we recommend a partial and conditional lift of the moratorium—partial in that the current moratorium on nuclear energy should remain for the older technologies but lifted for the new and emerging technologies, such as Generation III+ and Generation IV, including of course for small modular reactors; conditional in that the moratorium should be subject to a positive technological assessment and the prior informed consent of the local communities that might be impacted by the building of either a nuclear power plant or a waste facility. In summary, Australia should say a definite no to the old nuclear technologies but a conditional yes to the new and emerging technologies.

While proud to lay this report here in the chamber today, I do concede that it is with an element of disappointment because of the position taken by the Australian Labor Party. I'm not reflecting here on the character or conduct of the Labor members of the committee; they give me no reason to do so. However, I am reflecting on the blatantly political nature of their dissenting report. The Labor Party say they believe in climate change. Yet they deny Australians an opportunity to even consider the possibility of using the single largest source of emissions free base-load technology the world has ever seen. The Labor Party say they trust science. Yet they flatly reject the science that underpins a source of energy representing 11 per cent of electricity around the world, adopted by many countries—many of our allies and like countries—and with another five countries entering the sector as we speak.

The Labor Party have in the past been very quick to embrace and speak about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and some of their reports. Yet they go deathly silent when the IPCC comes out and says nuclear energy is 'a mitigating technology for climate change'. The Labor Party claims to be the party of the worker and the party of civil society. Yet when it comes to considering the possibility of nuclear energy in Australia, they defy the will and the request of many of their rank and file, and they snub their nose to the possibility that the Australian people should have a right to be engaged in this public debate. The Labor Party says it believes in free markets. Yet it argues that nuclear technology should be illegal in Australia because 'it might be too expensive'. When has any technology ever been banned in Australia because it might be too expensive? Even the basis of

that argument is flawed data: there was a lot of debate in the committee based on a data point from the World Nuclear Association, who themselves rebuked its very existence.

The Labor Party argues that nuclear energy is not safe by referencing the Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima incidents. They know very well that the technology used at those three sites has already been absolutely rejected in this report. But they are happy to run on the politics. The Labor Party argues that nuclear energy shouldn't even be considered because 'renewables will do the entire job'. Yet they know that trying to set this up as some sort of binary choice between nuclear energy and renewable energy is false logic. Renewables need partners to firm up. World over, nuclear is one of those technologies that provides the firming; the base-load and the newer technologies have the ability to ramp up and ramp down to make them compatible with the intermittency of solar and wind.

Let me close by recognising the importance of the topic of nuclear energy. As a country, we certainly cannot go down the path of adopting nuclear energy without bipartisanship. The report that has been tabled today does not say that Australia must adopt nuclear energy; it says we need to have a conversation. We need to have that conversation. But the Labor Party, despite all of its rhetoric about climate change, is refusing the Australian people the right. I commend this report to the House and I commend the report to the government. I move:

That the House take note of the report.

Debate adjourned.