



Speech by

Peter Wellington

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard Wednesday, 7 June 2006

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (5.22 pm): I rise to participate in this debate. I remind members of the House that the motion we are debating tonight states—

That this parliament expresses its opposition to any nuclear reactor or nuclear waste dump in Queensland and calls on the Prime Minister to rule out using any federal powers to impose such facilities on Queenslanders.

I have been asked by my fellow Independents and the One Nation member of this parliament to speak on their behalf and contribute to this debate by opposing any possible nuclear reactor or nuclear waste dump not just on the Sunshine Coast but also in Queensland and to support the call for the Prime Minister to rule out using any federal powers to impose the siting of such facilities in Queensland.

I take this opportunity to refer members to section 51 of the Constitution, which clearly sets out the powers of the federal government. I table that for the benefit of all members, because I do not think I have heard any member quote section 51 in this debate tonight.

The other option that is open to the Prime Minister that members should be aware of is for him to rely on section 96 of the Constitution. The Prime Minister may use that section as an avenue by which he can perhaps blackmail a non-compliant state government into taking a particular course of action to achieve the outcome that he wants through the provision of a conditional grant of money to the state. I call on the Prime Minister to rule out using any of his federal powers or, if he intends to do that, to tell us that he intends to do that tomorrow to clear up this matter once and for all.

I believe that the solution to our country's energy needs and related problems can be found not in nuclear energy but in the climate-friendly, renewable energy fields of wind, solar and hydro power wherever possible and in the gas industry wherever possible. The member for the Tablelands indicated that the Tully-Millstream hydro power station is three-quarters completed.

I also believe that we should support further investigation into the conversion of coal into clean energy. We have many, many years of this valuable resource available to us and it is able to be extracted to provide to an existing market over which we have control and in which we have the expertise. Only yesterday our Treasurer, Anna Bligh, brought down the state government's budget and while doing so referred to the important income generated for Queensland as a result of the export of Queensland coal. I certainly believe that we should be investigating how we can improve what we do already instead of going in a completely new direction in which we have little direct involvement.

It is very timely that, in the same week the Prime Minister announced that an inquiry is to be held into uranium mining, processing and exporting, our parliament, the 51st Parliament of Queensland, is debating this motion. In announcing the inquiry the Prime Minister emphasised the potential for Australia to develop a uranium mining and processing industry and that Australia holds 40 per cent of the world's known, low-cost renewable uranium reserves and Canada holds approximately 20 per cent of the world's known world uranium reserves.

I refer to the amendment to the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. I note that it refers to something totally different. It refers to a level of accountability. When I read that amendment I thought that

we could all ask for more accountability, for more scrutiny and for more monitoring. I do not have a problem with that part of the amendment. But I find it difficult to comprehend that, although the primary motion is about state-federal relations, the alternative government moved an amendment that refers to 'higher levels of accountability, scrutiny and monitoring of existing radioactive waste transportation and storage facilities'. At a time when we should be sending messages to our electorates about what our views are as we head to an election, I would have hoped that the Leader of the Opposition would be saying yes or no in terms of the opposition's position on this important issue.

I also note that the amendment refers to higher levels of accountability and independent radiation safety inspections. I think those proposals are sensible and reasonable. I support them. But I have a problem when we sit in this place and listen to a debate of a motion that primarily is about a totally different issue. The member for Burnett tried to respond to the motion. But speaker after speaker from the opposition side spoke about the amendment, which I thought had no direct connection with the motion, which I thought we were here primarily to debate. We certainly do not support any radiation waste facility being located on the Sunshine Coast or anywhere else in Queensland.

Tabled paper: Copy of section 51 of Commonwealth Constitution.