



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Wednesday, 7 June 2006

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (5.12 pm): The feasibility of nuclear energy is a very important debate which all Australians must participate in and engage with, and I support the Leader of the Opposition's amendment to the motion. The debate should not be used as a PR device to prop up failing opinion polls for a Premier who would do anything to get himself re-elected and back in charge of the state's chequebook. We cannot afford not to engage in this debate because it is linked to the very survival of the species. In this motion before the parliament the Premier is acting like a 15-year-old schoolboy running for class captain rather than a respected statesman in charge of the fastest growing state in Australia.

Nuclear technology, just like many other modern technologies of flight, medicine, physics and biology, is moving at an incomprehensible speed. This morning on 612 ABC Radio I heard for the first time about an accelerator-driven nuclear reactor which uses barium as fuel, the waste of which takes 500 years to reach safe radioactive levels as opposed to hundreds of thousands of years for plutonium for the current generation of reactors. Climate change and the threat that greenhouse gases pose to our environment leaves us with no choice as to whether we engage with this debate, and engage with this debate sensibly. A responsible government must consider whether nuclear or other energy sources would be suitable and sustainable for Queensland in the year 2030.

A responsible government will listen not only to the experts but also to the vast wisdom that is to be found in our local communities. The mums and dads of Queensland will not be dictated to and told by a know-it-all Premier that they cannot at least investigate ways of finding a better future for their children and their communities. Today the Deputy Premier said that as it gets hotter in the world it gets drier. She should get her facts straight because, according to Tim Flannery's book *The Weather Makers*, the hotter the average temperature becomes in this world, the wetter it becomes. For every degree that it becomes hotter, there is one per cent more rain in this world. It just does not happen in the same time and place and with consistency. We have a Deputy Premier who does not even know the basic facts 101 of the environment.

In early April I asked the Parliamentary Library to conduct a research brief, and I think that this is an appropriate moment to share some of the excellent information gathered by researcher Wayne Jarred, whose brief states—

The use of uranium ore as the basis for power generation cycle accounts for approximately 55% of the world's power output.

If we accept the Premier's logic that this is a half-baked idea, then 55 per cent of the world is getting its power from a half-baked idea. The research brief continues—

The cost structure of nuclear power generation consists of high capital costs but low fuel costs and this results in demand for uranium fuel that is much more predictable than with any other mineral commodity.

The forecast post 2005 is that world market demand is expected to grow to a point where by 2030 power generation will be double that of the year 2004. This has given rise to the expectation that uranium demand will grow because of greenhouse gas concerns.

There are approximately 440 reactors operating in the world requiring about 77 tonnes of uranium oxide concentrate. Whilst reactors are growing slowly they are at the same time being run more efficiently and on a world wide scale with the result that there was a reduction of 25% in uranium demand per kWh output in Europe between 1970 and 1990.

Stockpiles managed by utility operators that had increased over time have now largely been depleted.

In closing, this motion before the House shows that the Premier, whose attention is fixed on the next two months—or rather the next election—is using this as a diversion to take the attention off very important issues that we have to deal with now. They are issues like the health system, which is falling apart, and the education system. We need a leader in Queensland who has the courage and vision to look towards the next 20 years. We need a leader who is at least able to acknowledge that there is no formal nuclear waste program in Queensland, whose nuclear waste program and policy do not amount to nuclear waste. What nuclear waste? On Richard Fidler's radio show this morning on 612 ABC a caller left us with a very simple and powerful rhyme and thought: use your cranium, investigate uranium.