



Speech by

Vicky Darling

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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NUCLEAR ENERGY

Ms DARING (Sandgate—ALP) (12.43 pm): I rise to express my deep concern at the lack of evidence to support safe and environmentally sensitive disposal of uranium waste. The uranium mining, processing and nuclear energy review draft report contains little assurance and, in fact, makes me question the Howard government's true valuation of nuclear energy.

The federal coalition has displayed its dodgy environmental credentials before, but never have I seen such a charlatan dressed up as a saviour. The Australian people need assurances. We cannot begin to travel a path to nuclear power without all the answers. How can 40 years of research tell us that nuclear waste will be safe if buried deep underground for 600 years? Polluting the soil to clean the air is such a stupid idea that I can only conclude that the Prime Minister's motives are either political or financial.

Touting the benefits of nuclear energy is not futuristic policy; it is short-sighted and self-serving. The federal government is encouraging the people of Australia to embrace an energy source that will cost 50 per cent more than current power options to reverse the effects of an environmental phenomenon it said was not real. Apparently, federal coalition members have now seen the movie and they are all believers in global warming. But I suspect they worship mammon, not mother earth.

Let me quote some discussion points on waste disposal from Ziggy's review. The report states—

Deep underground disposal in stable geological structures is seen as the most appropriate solution, but one which currently has the support of less than half of the citizens of the European Union.

But apparently nuclear powered governments overseas are finding ways to turn local opinion. Let me quote some more from this wonderful report. It states—

It is widely accepted that a host community should be compensated for accepting a facility which benefits an entire country.

Now this is sounding more like the federal government's tactics when trying to win the hearts and pockets of the Australian people. Let us read some more from this wonderful report. It states—

While a number of countries with significant nuclear industries are moving to build national High Level Waste repositories, this may be difficult in countries lacking suitable geology.

So the Northern Hemisphere countries are looking for stable nuclear dumping sites, preferably on the other side of the world. And I would wager that these wealthy countries would pay good money to the naive country willing to take the waste. But what is in it for us? Let me read another quote that will complete this ugly picture. The report states—

As national governments will have to accept the ultimate responsibility for international repositories, funding arrangements must ensure there is adequate compensation for accepting this liability.

Now we are starting to see a possible motive for the federal coalition's sudden concern for global warming. I call on the Howard government to come clean and explain what value it puts on the life, health and safety of the people of Australia. We will not prostitute ourselves to the nuclear powered countries of the world. We are not for sale.

In discussing what is claimed to be the best method of disposing of nuclear waste, the report commissioned by the Prime Minister states—

The combination of natural barriers and engineered barrier systems provides a long lasting passively safe system ensuring that significant radioactivity will not return to the surface environment, with no burden of care on future generations.

'No burden of care on future generations'! We are now in a crisis situation. The earth will not cope with our thirst for power. We cannot afford to keep making decisions on the 'best known science of the day' and leave future generations to clean up the mess. Mr Howard should put the money into some realistic evidence based research. Better still, he should put the money into renewable energy options for use domestically and to export to the world. Come to Queensland and talk to our world-class environmental scientists. Come and talk to our energy minister about smart alternatives. It is now time for the voice of the people to be heard. Members opposite should prove their loyalty to the people of Queensland and stand up for our health and safety.

I urge the young people of this country to let the Prime Minister know—loud and clear—what they think of being left with cleaning up the mistakes of politicians who refuse to break the cycle of disastrous environmental decision making. And I urge the traditional custodians of this land to let the Prime Minister know—loud and clear—how they feel about the disposal of radioactive materials within the heart of the country, down in the stomach of the mother that sustains us.