Speech by

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Hansard Tuesday, 20 February 2007

NUCLEAR FACILITIES PROHIBITION BILL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (2.56 pm): I rise to support the Nuclear Facilities Prohibition Bill 2007. We do not need the risk, the expense, the danger, the public uproar or, in particular, the waste-handling problems of this glow-in-the-dark solution being proposed by Canberra. Nuclear power in itself is not the problem; the major concern is what happens to the waste products. I do not think anybody in Australia, or Queensland for that matter, would want to have nuclear waste dumped in their backyards. Nuclear power is certainly being used in a number of overseas countries and has been used for a very long time, but I think we all remember the horrific Chernobyl disaster in Russia not that long ago and there have been other accidents involving nuclear power over the years. Even if we only exported the uranium, our Australian government would be silly enough to allow the waste products to come back here to be disposed of. No-one would be naive enough to think that other countries would not save some of that material for ulterior motives.

Why should we have to consider mining uranium when other alternatives have not been fully utilised? For example, north Queensland has massive power-generating potential from the clean green hydro-electric option. I have spoken before about the enormous generating capacity of the Tully-Millstream project. This one scheme alone has already been engineered, has already had tens of millions of dollars spent on it and needs only to be completed to give us 500 kilowatts of electricity from renewable sources that do not pump out thousands and thousands of tonnes of greenhouse gas and which do not leave us with radioactive waste that will remain lethal for centuries. The extremist rabid stance on the tiny piece of affected rainforest cannot be sustained when the alternative is more massive coalmines, more coal-powered power stations or, worse, the introduction of nuclear reactors.

I have recently learnt more of the potential of the north and this is a potential that was realised, studied and was to go ahead under an earlier Labor government that was in power in the fifties but was abandoned by an incoming country party at the time. In the far north we have had some 50 years of outstandingly successful operations of Tinaroo Dam—which, as we all know, was built for irrigation in the fifties—followed by the Koombooloomba Dam and the Kareeya hydro scheme. The third tranche was to be a dam on the Herbert River, which has its headwaters on the tablelands and eventually runs out to sea near Ingham.

In a visionary approach, the old-school, traditional Labor Party looked ahead. They looked over the horizon and in planning for the future also carried out the engineering and other works necessary for what was to be the third leg of a massive scheme. The Herbert Dam, which was to be built south-west of Mount Garnet, was to have comprised a major dam wall with seven weirs back along the Herbert River to provide not only a truly enormous water storage facility but also flood mitigation for the coastal lowlands around Ingham. It was also to have giant hydro-electric generation capacity even bigger, I understand, than that of the Tully-Millstream project.

I am advised that this project was next on the list for construction when the conservatives took power in Queensland in the late fifties and killed it off. The Nationals have no credibility on dam issues in the far north and they have no answers either, apart from the Buck Rogers insanity of going nuclear. We in the far north well remember how the conservatives promised the Tully-Millstream project some 10 years

ago when they were in power in both state and federal parliaments. They went back on their word the minute they got into power in both parliaments in 1996. We have not forgotten.

Do we need more power-generating capacity? Of course we do. Do we need it in the far north? Of course—with our growing population and growing agriculture and industry, of course we do. Do we need it for our future? With the expected migration to the north of this state and this nation's population and industry, of course we do. Do we need to go nuclear to meet those needs? No, of course we do not. That is the kind of insanity that we see coming out of Canberra more and more often these days. While nuclear reactors may provide some answers in terms of power generation, we need to look at the entire process involved and especially the enormous problems posed by the waste material that they generate.

This is where I believe nuclear power generation fails badly. It is a process that creates material that is radioactive, potentially lethal and is either impossible to safely dispose of or astronomically expensive to deal with in any other fashion. And, of course, it is also a product that can potentially be used to create the most destructive weapons known to man.

We live in a world where the risk of this material falling into the wrong hands does exist. We live in a world where extremists will go to any lengths in pursuit of their insane agendas. It is impossible for anyone to make a weapon out of the water running from a hydro station; it is not impossible for nuclear waste to become a nuclear weapon. It is possible to stop that process before it begins by simply not going nuclear to start with. What we need is a commitment to go hydro, to go green and to get these environment-saving, planet-protecting schemes up and running.

I was pleased this morning to have heard the minister for energy talking about hydro and other alternative sources of power generation. I point out also, that along with the successful operation of the Koombooloomba-Kareeya project for decades, my electorate in the far north is also home to a highly successful wind generation facility near Ravenshoe. The far north has proven that there are alternatives to coal and nuclear which can be clean and green and do not glow in the dark. I will be supporting this bill.