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COMMITTEES: Industry and Resources Committee: Report

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**COMMITTEES
Industry and Resources Committee
Report**

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (12.49 p.m.)—I will start where the Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry and Resources finished. Every member of our committee thanks the secretary of this committee, Mr Russell Chafer; the inquiry secretary, Mr Jerome Brown; research officers, Mr Muzammil Ali and Ms Peggy Danaee; and administrative officer, Ms Penelope Humphries. We thank you not only for the support you have given but also for the superb research and the excellent writing of this report, which is the best written report ever presented to this parliament. All of its 688 pages clearly outline the situation we face with respect to Australia’s uranium industry and our exports to the world and the changes there have been in past decades in terms of the development of nuclear power and the development of different forms of the use of nuclear energy.

It also gives us a prospective look at fourth- and fifth-generation reactors and alternatives—dealt with clearly in the evidence we have taken. It deals with the fact that not only can we be the biggest exporter of uranium in the world but also that the world has two significant alternatives with regard to the use of nuclear power, and these alternatives are canvassed in the report. The first is simply to use uranium in a different way—that is, instead of using it once, the products of the uranium fuel cycle be utilised over and over again so that the plutonium that is produced is used up and no longer becomes a danger to the world for hundreds of thousands years but in the order of 300,000 years, in which case the storage of that material in a safe way becomes an entirely different issue from what has been faced by the

world so far.

It is also possible that, instead of just producing 38 per cent of the world's uranium, Australia could be the leading producer of thorium. If thorium were used as a source of nuclear power—and some countries are already looking at building thorium reactors—we could be a supplier. The use of thorium would eliminate the possible deleterious effects through the plutonium cycle. The use of thorium as a basis of the civil use of nuclear power would be another solution for a world concerned about the problems with nonproliferation treaty. Those who gave evidence in respect of fusion argued that a fusion reactor could have been built 50 years ago. Many countries have now put their money where it is needed into research and development of a major fusion reactor in France.

There are possibly other ways to deal with this. Why have we not done anything about this over the past 30 years? Why did this groundbreaking work have to be initiated by a parliamentary committee? Why is it that the debate in Australia took all this time to get going? Why did it take the work of this committee to spark off discussion by the Prime Minister, the minister and everyone else in the country on the issue of uranium? I will give you a very simple quote from one of the people who gave evidence to the committee. They said:

It is easier to sell fear than it is reason.

For 30 years we have been dominated by fear of the nuclear cycle and the intersection of nuclear civil power and weapons—which of course came first. Fear can only be dispelled from the human mind and heart by knowledge and a scientific approach based on fact, not by the engendering of fear itself. That is why it was critical that members of the committee strove for a balanced, open approach based on scientific fact, not one based on the spread of fear and alarm. Our future is dependent on that.

One thing that might sum up this report is its recognition of people's concern—and so they should be concerned—about climate change. The very title of the report—*Australia's uranium: greenhouse friendly fuel for an energy hungry world*—reflects that concern. When I was driving to Canberra last night for a ballot today, I heard a report on jellyfish and the explosion in their numbers around the world. The world's oceans are warming and, as they warm, there has been an explosion in the number of phytoplankton. This phytoplankton is being eaten by increasing numbers of krill. The jellyfish are eating the krill, and this has helped to expand their numbers dramatically.

As nuclear power stations around the world, including US nuclear-powered ships moving their way through the oceans, draw in sea water to cool their reactors—they are not fourth- or fifth-generation reactors—they also draw in jellyfish, which can then stop reactors from working. The problem will have to be fixed by those countries that currently take Australian uranium. It is an indication of how the natural world is responding to what we have done. (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER—Does the member for Forrest wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?