

WHY HAVE WE ABANDONED THE ATOM?

Half the world population has it - what's the problem ?

By Keith Alder and John Reynolds

Australia's electricity supply comes mainly from coal-fired boilers producing 50 to 60% of Australia's carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

This electricity generating structure cannot survive if the Australian Government proceeds with its intention to reduce national carbon emissions by 60% through its Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).

The emission reduction target cannot be achieved unless the ETS forces the closure of most of Australia's coal-fired power generation capacity and its replacement by non-emitting technology.

The alternative is to reduce electricity consumption to such a low level that our economy and society will fall to third world status. 'Clean Coal' is a research topic, not yet demonstrated.

Taxing the power generating industry's carbon dioxide emissions through an ETS or in any other way, will cause immediately increases in electricity costs which will be passed on to consumers.

The only proven, non-carbon source of reliable, large-scale base load electricity, which is now used in 40 countries with a total population of over 3 billion is nuclear power.

The use of nuclear power is rapidly increasing throughout the world. Reactors now being built, plus those committed and firmly planned, will more than double world nuclear capacity within the next two decades, to over 800,000 megawatts, 17 times Australia's entire generating capacity. (Source WNA)

There are 31 countries producing nuclear power now, and another 11 planning to do so (some importing it meantime). Very few developed countries are not using it – eg, Australia and New Zealand.

All user countries are very much aware of the pros and cons of nuclear generation. The evidence over 53 years of operation is that nuclear power is acceptably safe, reliable and economic. The technology has evolved to make it even safer. In France communities are reported to be lobbying for new nuclear power stations to be built in their locality.

Why is Australia not contemplating its use? One reason is that existing Federal and some State laws prohibit it. Until this is corrected no one will risk money even to evaluate it.

A main argument against nuclear power in Australia is that we do not need it because we have ample coal reserves. But coal's future as the most economic source of power is now very much in doubt.

We have the largest uranium fuel resources in the world and plan to expand our uranium export industry to supply the growing world market. But we are not even evaluating its use for electricity here.

Why do we want to impose the great additional burden of an ETS on our economy?

Particularly now with the country already in recession, factories and businesses contracting or closing, unemployment increasing, the government going into debt and the future looking difficult. Instead, we should be emulating the French policy of the 1960s that established its nuclear industry.

Australian politicians are scared of nuclear power because they believe people won't vote for them if they support it. Probably this was true ten years ago, but now (according to a recent survey by Essential Research) more Australians say nuclear could be used here than oppose it. They feel that the majority of the world is right, and we are wrong to neglect the atom.

For those who worry about it, the per capita carbon dioxide release in France is 60% less than Australia's, because France is 80% nuclear. They don't need our emissions trading scheme – nor do we! We need leadership into nuclear energy.

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