

Dissenting Report by Senator Scott Ludlam

Australian Greens Senator for Western Australia

These dissenting remarks are restricted to citations or comments in the Committee's report that exaggerate the prospects of the uranium market in the Indian Ocean Region or which erroneously refer to nuclear as a clean energy source.

The Department of Resources and Energy falsely states that uranium is the "sleeping giant of Australian export commodities." While the indestructible optimism of the Department may have therapeutic value, it is simply not grounded in reality.

Uranium accounts for only 0.29 per cent of national export revenue and less than 0.015 per cent of Australian jobs in the decade to 2011. Further, companies like BHP and Cameco are mothballing their uranium projects.

The fact is that the nuclear industry has been badly shaken by the global financial crisis, its spiralling costs, the ongoing Fukushima disaster and overwhelming competition from renewable energy.

Market growth forecasts conjured by the Department project Asia outpacing the US for Australia's uranium. That forecast is predicated on selling uranium to states like India, a nuclear weapon state with an appalling track record on nuclear safety that produced its arsenal from a Canadian-supplied reactor it pledged to use only for 'peaceful purposes'.

While the Department describes Australia as "well placed to benefit" of such sales, the Indian people do not benefit. The Auditor General of India has condemned the Indian nuclear industry in part because there is no national policy on nuclear and radiation safety, and inspections, safety standards, emergency response plans, the supervision of licensing of nuclear sites, and the disposal of nuclear waste are all dangerously sub-standard.

Just eight years ago, K. Subrahmanyam, former head of the national security advisory board in India, said: '...it is to India's advantage to categorise as many power reactors as possible as civilian ones to be refuelled by imported uranium and conserve our native uranium fuel for weapons-grade plutonium production'. Australian uranium will benefit only India's nuclear weapons capacity.

In India, hundreds of thousands of men and women have mobilised in peaceful anti-nuclear protests - and they have been subject to severe, brutal repression from police. Five of the activists have been murdered since 2010 in the struggle against the nuclear industry in Koodankulam (Tamil Nadu), Jaitapur (Maharashtra) and Gorakhpur (Haryana).

The "benefits" described by the Department of Resources should not be countenanced when they will be gained from thrusting this material and technology upon unwilling communities at gunpoint.

The myth that Australian uranium in nuclear reactors would assist India with a low carbon technology is not credible when uranium mining, the building of nuclear power plants and their ongoing running are all carbon intensive, as is the storage of nuclear waste for up to 250,000 years in the case of plutonium.

The NT Government's reference to nuclear energy as clean is also absurd. Nuclear reactors routinely emit radiation as a normal part of their operation. Radiation is uniquely hazardous, persistent and indiscriminate, damaging our DNA which is passed on to future generations. Nuclear facilities are an obvious strategic or terrorist target – they turn conventional weapons into potential 'dirty bombs'. Accidents are a fact of life that no amount of engineering can completely overcome. Serious accidents at nuclear power plants can be catastrophic – potentially killing tens of thousands of people and rendering vast tracts of land uninhabitable for hundreds of years.

The only sustainable long term solution is to phase out the use of fossil fuels and phase in the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies. Not only will this help to protect the climate and reduce the pollution and health effects of fossil fuels, it will also create independence for countries in the Indian Ocean Region currently reliant on fossil fuels from unstable areas such as the Middle East.

No one need be killed or injured for want of a wind turbine or solar panel and for this reason it is appropriate to call renewable energy peaceful and clean. Every country has abundant indigenous sources of their own renewable energy. The Indian Ocean Region has abundant solar radiation that could power solar thermal power plants, providing sustainable, reliable and independent energy. Australia providing that form of technology and assistance, rather than uranium, would provide tangible and material benefits to both Australia and the countries of the Indian Ocean Rim

Senator Scott Ludlam

Australian Greens