

## URANIUM MINING

### *Statement*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [9.48 pm]: I have said in this chamber on several previous occasions that I am very proud to be a member of the Gallop Labor government in this thirty-seventh Parliament. I am particularly proud of the steps that the Labor government has taken since its election in 2001 to protect our unique environment, to protect the Western Australian lifestyle and to protect the wellbeing of Western Australian workers and their families. Nowhere do these three issues - the protection of the environment, the protection of our lifestyle and the protection of working families - come together as clearly as they do in the government's decision to ban the mining of uranium. I am very pleased to stand here today and reiterate the points made in this chamber last month by my friend and colleague Hon Vince Catania when he assured us of his support for the position of the Premier and the Australian Labor Party on the banning of uranium mining. I thought it would be useful to expand on the reasons that this support has been unanimous in the past and will, without doubt, continue to be unanimous in the future. Before I do that, it is perhaps worth pointing out, particularly to members opposite who may not be overly familiar with the procedures and practices of the Australian Labor Party, that Labor Party policy making is an open and transparent process of which we on this side of the house are justifiably proud. We do not rely on faceless men and women issuing directives from secret negotiations.

**Hon Ken Travers:** And our shadow ministers were always there when we changed the policy or debated it!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Absolutely, as my friend Hon Ken Travers has pointed out. We bring delegates together from around the state. We invite the media to join us. We argue our way, sometimes line by painful line, through several hundred pages of platform that has been drafted by 15 separate committees that welcome all who serve on them. The next chance to do this will be at the end of November. Speaking as a former party official, I must say it is nice to see people getting so excited by the prospect that they are already rehearsing their arguments and debates. That is not, of course, what I intend to do tonight. I intend to confine my remarks to explaining why in my view the government's ban on uranium mining - a ban, incidentally, that Labor has taken to the last two elections - should not be lifted while Labor forms government in this state.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash):** Order, members! Hon Sally Talbot has the floor.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I take serious note of the plea made by those advocating open discussion that we further this debate without being hamstrung by urban myth and hysterics. I am happy to address my remarks to the facts. What do we know about the nuclear industry? Professor John Veevers, Emeritus Professor of Earth Sciences at Macquarie University, has talked about the four basic obstacles in the way of the nuclear industry being scaled up. The first is cost. He states that no breeder reactor necessary for nuclear fission to be a long-term solution has ever been successful in the marketplace. The second is incompetence. He states that because each plant has such enormous energy content, staff incompetence, even at reactors billed as inherently safe, can lead to much more serious disasters than from other energy sources. He states also that the accidents at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island during the earlier nuclear age could multiply one hundredfold in the scaled-up age. The third is that a world filled with nuclear reactors would necessarily include large-scale traffic in plutonium. That means that just one criminal fanatic in the supply chain could trigger a nuclear catastrophe. The fourth is that the long-lived cumulative character of nuclear waste defies solution.

I suggest we cannot get much more clarity than that. Nuclear power is not economically sustainable. In case members want to hear from the financiers as well as the scientists, Standard and Poor's, a rating agency, stated recently that the industry's legacy of cost growth, technological problems and cumbersome political and regulatory oversight, and the newer risks brought about by competition and terrorism, may keep the credit risk too high for even federal regulation that provides loan guarantees to overcome. *The Economist* reported last month that the British government has just committed £50 billion to bail out the failed nuclear waste projects that were run by British Nuclear Fuels before it went broke, while the Swedes have just costed their nuclear waste program at \$12 billion. Nuclear power is not environmentally sustainable. Worldwide it currently provides 16 per cent of power generation and 30 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. Uranium mining is not environmentally sustainable. Its by-products - thorium-230 and radium-226 - have half-lives of 75 000 years and 1 600 years respectively. All mining is dangerous.

However, mining uranium entails what risk analysts call dread risks. That means that the risks are not confined to the time or place of the mining or the person doing the mining. These are risks such as birth defects, high infant mortality and chronic conditions of the lungs, skin, eyes and reproductive system. It is not just mine workers who are at risk; it is also the men and women who drive the road trains and load the ships, the families who live near the tailings and the communities whose water and soil are polluted by the hundreds of spills,

accidents and leaks that constantly beset the industry. Again, all this information is available from expert sources, such as the World Health Organisation - hardly a peddler of urban myth and hysterics.

In conclusion, I caution those who might be warming up their arguments for the end of November that there can no longer be any question about the link between the uranium dug up to generate power and the uranium that finds its way into the weapons industry. The simple fact is that if there is the technology to build a nuclear reactor, there is the technology to make nuclear weapons. Just look at the countries that we know or suspect have nuclear weapons capacity - India, Pakistan, South Africa, Iran, Israel and North Korea. All of them gained their nuclear weapons proficiency through civil nuclear programs. This is not idle speculation and it is not scaremongering or hysteria; it is the conclusion drawn from evidence collected and published by organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, which incidentally concluded recently that it is simply impossible to account for the use of all the uranium around the world.

I said that I was proud to be a member of the Gallop Labor government. I am also proud that our government is led by a leader who behaves like a leader and who positively revels in the opportunity to engage in debate about issues that affect the wellbeing of Western Australians, such as the mining and export of uranium. We have had that debate in the party room, we have had it in the Parliament and we will continue to have it whenever people need reminding about how completely sound our policy is because, as the Premier said during the recent uranium debate in the other place -

We will not allow practices in Western Australia that will lead to negative social and environmental consequences.

He also said that this government will resist false solutions being peddled by people who want to make a buck out of the uranium industry.

*House adjourned at 9.57 pm*

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