

Submission to the Australian Senate Inquiry into Nuclear Power Generation in Australia

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Introduction

This submission presents concerns about recent proposals from the Liberal National Party (LNP) to explore nuclear power generation in Australia, particularly focusing on proposed pilot projects in regional locations like Biloela, Queensland. Given Australia's pressing need to reduce emissions and transition to sustainable energy sources, this proposal appears less an earnest attempt to address climate change and more a political strategy to delay the widespread adoption of renewable energy. Nuclear energy, which is costly, time-consuming to develop, and controversial in Australia, should not detract from our clear path to achieving climate goals: rapidly increasing investments in renewables such as solar, wind, and battery storage.

Nuclear as a Stalling Tactic: Political Context and Motivations

The LNP's recent interest in nuclear energy seems out of step with international best practices and Australia's unique energy potential. Australia has some of the world's best renewable resources and is positioned to be a leader in solar, wind, and green hydrogen energy. Despite this, the LNP's nuclear narrative appears designed to introduce doubt and delay—potentially stalling renewable energy projects while bolstering coal interests, which have historically been supported by the party.

The LNP's promotion of a proposed nuclear power plant to be located on the site of the declining and beleaguered coal-powered Callide B Power Station near Biloela, is a masterful political ploy for the conservative forces at play in the Australian political arena. It makes the LNP look like they are being proactive about the rising price of electricity, which is top of mind for all Australians, at the same time as satisfying the coal lobbyists who directly benefit from continuing high energy prices.

At both state and federal levels, Callide is in very, very, safe LNP seats in rural Central Queensland, far away from the city 'greenies' or 'teals'. The locals (both farmers and miners) are swept up in the anti-renewables rhetoric promoted by the LNP members of parliament on social media and anyone who tries to point out the virtues of renewables are being personally demonised in a small community.

My late father and grandfather farmed land near Biloela since the 1940s - long before the Callide Power Stations were built. Now, my brother and elderly widowed mother, whose farmland has been through the local council approval processes for establishment of a solar farm, due in part to its easy logistical access to the existing grid, have been brutally trolled on a LNP-aligned social media protest sites against renewables, with comments like "the old farmer would be rolling over in his grave" and "they have sold their soul" [*to the devil* is implied]. LNP Leader Peter Dutton appeared on TV with Colin Boyce (local MP) and a few hand-picked neighbours, arguing that a solar farm would be unsightly and bring down their

property values, but at the same time enthusiastically waxing lyrical about how wonderful it would be to have a nuclear power plant in their backyard.

There are several elements of concern regarding the LNP's motivations:

1. Support for the Coal Industry: The LNP's alignment with the resources industry is a cynical exercise in connecting with rural and regional voters. The Nationals traditionally aimed themselves at farmers and graziers, but with the agricultural industry declining in influence and population proportion, now The Nationals need the support of mine workers to remain relevant on regional issues. The Liberals simply want to provide an alternative to anything perceived to be attractive to inner-city small 'l' liberals. This suggests that their interest in nuclear power may be intended to protect coal's role in Australia's energy mix for as long as possible from a ballot box perspective, rather than a genuine attempt to explore future energy alternatives. Proposing nuclear as a "solution" requires years of planning, feasibility studies, regulatory changes, and public consultation—all of which introduce delays to more immediate climate actions.

2. Political “Greenwashing”: Nuclear power has been presented as a zero-emission energy solution by the LNP, yet this overlooks the very real, long-term environmental costs associated with uranium mining, radioactive waste management, and decommissioning. This narrative may attempt to position the LNP as pro-climate while sidestepping the more pressing—and viable—renewable solutions already available.

3. Testing Public Sentiment: Targeting a specific community, such as Biloela, appears to be a way of gauging public reaction without committing to substantial energy infrastructure changes. By using Biloela as a testing ground, the LNP could be gauging support or opposition in a controlled way, buying time and creating a politically safe buffer before committing to concrete energy strategies.

Economic and Environmental Arguments Against Nuclear Power

1. Time and Cost: Nuclear power plants require vast capital investment and a timeframe of 10 to 15 years for development, even under ideal conditions. This is counterproductive to Australia's urgent emissions reduction targets. In contrast, renewable projects such as solar and wind farms are faster to deploy, economically advantageous, and enjoy high levels of public support.

2. Environmental Risks: While nuclear power has low operational emissions, the processes of mining, waste storage, and eventual plant decommissioning have significant environmental impacts. These costs, particularly the long-term risk of radioactive waste, contradict Australia's commitment to a cleaner, greener future. Building nuclear power facilities cannot be separated from the need to also build safe storage disposal solutions for high-level radioactive waste.

3. Opportunity Costs for Renewables: Any investment in nuclear technology diverts public and private funding from renewable energy projects. Australia has an abundance of renewable energy potential that can be harnessed immediately, without the social, economic, or environmental burdens that accompany nuclear energy.

Proposing a Clear, Renewable Path Forward

Rather than focusing on nuclear energy as a distraction, Australia should double down on its commitment to renewables:

1. Expand Solar and Wind Infrastructure: Australia's solar and wind potential is among the best in the world. Expanding these resources—along with investing in large-scale storage options such as pumped hydro and battery storage—will generate clean energy quickly and cost-effectively. Why are we not exploring the use of more Crown land along existing rail and road corridors? Throughout Europe solar and wind farms are co-located with existing infrastructure routes.

2. Support Green Hydrogen Development: Australia has the opportunity to lead in the green hydrogen market, which can support energy exports, provide domestic energy security, and create jobs in regional communities.

3. Regional Job Creation in Renewables: Renewable energy development in regions like Biloela could provide substantial job opportunities, with projects that create immediate employment in construction, installation, and long-term operational roles. This would create sustainable job opportunities without the divisive risks posed by nuclear projects.

Conclusion

The LNP's renewed interest in nuclear power appears to be a strategic move to stall renewable energy progress while protecting the fossil fuel industry, particularly coal. Nuclear power is neither cost-effective nor timely given the urgency of the climate crisis. Renewable energy represents the most viable, scalable, and widely supported solution to achieving Australia's climate targets. The Senate should resist any move to allow nuclear power to disrupt or delay our transition to a renewable-based energy grid.

Recommendations

1. Reject Nuclear Power as a Primary Energy Solution: Australia's energy future should be based on renewables, not on costly and time-consuming nuclear projects.

2. Accelerate Renewable Energy Development: Focus on fast-tracking projects in solar, wind, and green hydrogen, prioritizing regions that need economic support and jobs.

3. Increase Investment in Renewable Technology and Training: Allocate funds to ensure Australia builds the expertise and infrastructure needed for a renewable future.

Thank you for considering this submission, and I urge the Senate to prioritise Australia's renewable energy future over costly, outdated nuclear ambitions.

Useful sources

Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) <https://www.acf.org.au/>

Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) <https://www.aemo.com.au/>

Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) <https://arena.gov.au/>

Beyond Zero Emissions <https://bze.org.au/>

Clean Energy Council Australia <https://www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/>

Climate Council of Australia <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/>

CSIRO <https://www.csiro.au/>

Energy Transition Hub, University of Melbourne <https://energy.unimelb.edu.au/>

Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems
(Germany) <https://www.ise.fraunhofer.de/en.html>

Greenpeace Australia Pacific <https://www.greenpeace.org.au/>

Greenpeace International <https://www.greenpeace.org/>

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Reports <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

International Energy Agency (IEA) <https://www.iea.org/>

International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) <https://www.irena.org/>

National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) <https://www.nrel.gov/>

The Solar Foundation <https://www.thesolarfoundation.org/>

Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) <https://www.ucsusa.org/>

University of Arizona, Agrivoltaics Project <https://ag.arizona.edu/>

World Nuclear Industry Status Report <https://www.worldnuclearreport.org/>

World Resources Institute (WRI) <https://www.wri.org/>