

1st December 2022

Submission to the Inquiry into the Removal of Nuclear Prohibition (Federal)

I note that this Bill seeks to remove the federal prohibition on nuclear installations in Australia. There are also state prohibitions that would also need to be removed for any nuclear installations to proceed in a state, but removing the federal prohibition would be a step towards promoting the nuclear industry in Australia.

My main point would be - regardless of the potential benefits and potential of nuclear industry in Australia, which would need to be considered against the costs, risks and community sentiment - that it is a distraction from the urgent action that needs to happen now.

Nuclear energy would conservatively take some 15-20 years to become operational. In the meantime, there would be tremendous public debate and opposition (whether nuclear energy can be determined to be safe, and arguably it could, public sentiment is still tough and perhaps insurmountable hurdle). Moreover, there would be immense costs in the construction of any nuclear installations, likely requiring much government support. For all that, there is the potential for something coming online perhaps in 2040 or later. Liberal governments have flirted with the idea of nuclear energy off and on for decades. Perhaps if they really committed to it back under John Howard and had a successful push for it, nuclear power would be coming online soon or be an option. However, the time has passed on nuclear energy being a realistic option.

While I would usually applaud long-term visionary thinking from members of Parliament, looking at starting up nuclear activities seems like a far off plan that can do little to address the challenges that we are facing - including the need to have a speedy transition to a low-emissions economy *now*. Where countries already have an established nuclear industry, it provides an important source of energy & will be a key part of their transition to a Net Zero economy. Once constructed, nuclear energy can operate with very few emissions. However, for a country without

an established nuclear energy industry, such as Australia, it is not something that can be constructed simply.

Renewable energy is the cheapest, and fastest to build, source of new energy. With battery storage and transmission lines, renewable energy will be poised to assume an increasingly prominent role in the energy makeup in Australia. The decarbonisation of the energy sector will require a variety of strategies and technologies and creative solutions. However, renewable energy will clearly be key (and arguably largely sufficient) to transitioning to a more affordable and sustainable energy system. As economist Ross Garnaut writes, *"I now have no doubt that intermittent renewables could meet 100 per cent of Australia's electricity requirements by the 2030s, with high degrees of security and reliability, and at wholesale prices much lower than experienced in Australia over the past half-dozen."*¹ I note that there is a concurrent Inquiry into Australia's Transition to a Green Energy Superpower, which provides a good (and more relevant) window into the opportunities Australia can take up for our energy future.

My key point is that is where our focus should be, on supporting low-cost and sustainable green energy technologies that we have now, such as solar and wind, rather than being distracted by big academic debates about the potential (and unlikely) viability of nuclear energy.

Benjamin Cronshaw.

Garnaut, Ross. 2019. *Superpower: Australia's Low-Carbon Opportunity*. La Trobe University Press: Melbourne.

¹ Garnaut 2019, 101.