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**“Mining uranium – Undermining the future: Australia’s nuclear ambitions and the region”**

I would like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the country that we are meeting on today. The Indigenous people in this country and in every country around the world are the communities that have been most adversely impacted and continue to be most adversely impacted by the nuclear industry and that is very much the case here in Australia.

The topic of the presentation today is ‘Mining uranium: Undermining the future’ And it is a key time of challenge and choice in Australia and the decisions that we make and the direction we take in this country have a significant impact and resonance around the world. What I wanted to do is basically sketch a little snap shot of the nuclear landscape of Australia in 2007 and then some of the ways forward to ensure that we can effectively address some of the challenges we are facing.

Uranium mining is a starting point of this whole cycle. There are three operating mines in Australia, one in the Northern Territory, two in South Australia. There is extensive exploration and a strong push for the expansion of existing mines and the development of new ones. This industry has been long contested in Australia as many people in this room know and have been actively involved over many years and with good reason because we hold 40% of the world’s uranium reserves in this country. We’ve had some very powerful and very positive successes in our opposition, most notably and recently at Jabiluka. A very significant victory where that proposal has been stalled, not stopped, but stalled by a combination of Traditional Owner and community opposition.

At the moment everyday in the paper, everyday in the press there is a lot of pro-uranium chatter. There’s speculation, there’s share action, there’s market floats - I think it is important to note that not everything that floats is sea worthy. The two major parties now support expanded uranium mining. That’s been a significant policy issue and a loss for us this year with the federal ALP moving from a flawed but restricted policy to now effectively an open slather one.

There are important state bans that remain with ALP governments in Queensland and Western Australia and if you look at the operation and the performance of the industry, we have an industry here that the most recent independent report of the uranium industry found was categorized by a culture of regulatory non-compliance and operational under- performance. There are site specific and adverse environmental,

social and culturally impacts at every uranium mine site in the country and particularly related to waste management and water contamination issues. Waste and water are very big problems for this industry, it has a history of leaks, spills and incidents. It's not clean, it's not safe.

Now all of Australia's uranium is exported and Australia fuels the global nuclear chain and global nuclear threat. We are effectively a toxic quarry and we have an increasingly murky and irresponsible uranium sales program. China, which has not ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which is a nuclear weapons state, which is facing off against Taiwan, which doesn't have the effective civil society groups - independent media, independent trade unions, effective non-government organizations, effective citizen groups - which have been so important in many parts of the world, in trying to humbug and watchdog this industry. China has a poor human rights record but it has deep pockets and we're lining up to sell, but we are playing both sides of the fence because even though we don't recognize Taiwan, we are selling uranium to Taiwan via a US intermediary.

We have proposed sales to India, a nuclear weapon state, a non signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It has developed and deployed weapons, it's got them poised and pointed at Pakistan today. It's conducted nuclear tests, its civil and its military nuclear programs are intimately linked and we are talking about selling uranium to them, absolutely actively undermining international frameworks for disarmament or weapons control. And now the Russian President Putin is on his way out here and he wants to also talk Australian uranium and uranium enrichment at APEC in the coming week.

We have uranium sales, deals and dialogue with all the declared nuclear weapon states, China, Russia, France, the UK and the US. And all of these are not compliant with international law and not compliant with the provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. And instead of putting on a sanction, instead of using leverage to get compliance, Australia turns a blind eye and tries to cut more deals.

Now uranium is unique, it's a building block, the first step for nuclear power and nuclear weapons. It has unique properties and it poses unique risks and the key challenge for us is to keep this message of uranium's unique properties and risks clear amidst the overall boosterism of the resource boom that we are currently experiencing in Australia. What we can guarantee is that every gram of Australian uranium will become radioactive waste. What we can't guarantee is that not one gram will find its way into nuclear weapons.

Australia is also actively pushing nuclear cooperation agreements and exchange agreements and bilateral agreements in the region with Thailand, with Vietnam, with Indonesia. And we're talking up the problem, we're not driving solutions. We're talking up uranium enrichment; we're talking up domestic nuclear power that has been

strongly promoted by senior government figures including the PM, even though others are more skeptical about its costs and the delays. Ziggy Switkowski, the ever so independent hand picked director of the PM's 'robust' nuclear Inquiry, outlined a vision of 25 reactors by 2050. That would be the biggest per capita new build reactor program in the world. Now that's not the vision I think that most Australians have of their country - as the world's biggest uranium quarry, as the world's biggest new nuclear power plant embracer and as the world's radioactive waste dump.

Nuclear power is currently illegal under federal and state law in Australia. Now the Prime Minister has said that he will remove those prohibitions in order to facilitate the development of the nuclear industry. It would be interesting to see how that goes and whether that proceeds given the public pressure that the Party has been under recently in relation to binding plebiscites on where a reactor might be sited. There is another NIMBY issue for the coalition in this election and its definition is 'not in marginals before elections' because while the Prime Minister is talking up the joys of nuclear power, a lot of backbenchers are very nervous about what that might mean.

Australians remain skeptical about nuclear power, the ALP is opposed there is not a bilateral or a bipartisan agreement on this and Australia's track record on this isn't good. If you look at Lucas Heights up the road here in Sydney, it was imposed. The government never made a credible or convincing argument about why we need it. It's on a seismic fault line, there were construction irregularities that meant it ran over time and over budget. It was our biggest ever capital spend on science and technology in this country. It was opened by an enthusiastic Prime Minister in April 2007 and he declared it a 'triumph' and there was an unscheduled shut down in July 2007 due to leaks in the heavy water pond and buckling of the fuel elements. No date as to when it will open again - a radioactive white elephant, from fizz to flop, from launch to lurch, in three months.

Then we come onto the third part which is nuclear waste. This is the third part of the toxic trifecta. The federal government has been searching for over a decade to find a site for a nuclear waste dump in Australia. Its plan to dump radioactive waste in South Australia was defeated by strong community and indigenous opposition, since then it has moved north and looked to the Northern Territory - Australia's least populated and least politically powerful state. It announced it is looking now at four sites and it will make an announcement of which site, conveniently, after the federal election.

In 2004 because of pressure on this the government made a clear commitment. The then environment minister went to Darwin and said 'I give you a complete categorical assurance, a complete categorical assurance that there will be no dump in the Northern Territory'. They broke that promise and now they are looking at imposing this stuff. It's a bad policy, it's been made by a flawed process and it is based on a broken promise. This Northern Territory waste dump plan is a disgrace. It will be a significant campaign,

it deserves to be and I hope that, to the extent that you can, you can support it because it is a disgrace.

The government has used the most slender Senate majority to twice pass laws that actively take away peoples' rights. It stripped power from states and territories to say no. It removed the requirement for procedural fairness, removed the requirement or ability to appeal. And when the Central Land Council, when environment groups like the ACF and others, when the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission made submissions about our concerns over this to a half day Senate Inquiry into the legislation the response we got from the government controlled Inquiry committee was that 'questions of due process and appeal rights are minor and subsidiary issues that arise from fear or ignorance'.

Appeal rights and due process are not minor and subsidiary issues. They are fundamental to a democracy. And there is a real concern that any dump in the Northern Territory will be the thin edge of the radioactive wedge. There are long held plans by many people who view Australia as a global solution and a spot for the growing intractable problem of nuclear waste management.

In the late 1990s environment groups exposed and headed off an international group, Pangea Resources, which had money from British Nuclear Fuels, from the Swiss nuclear agency and from the US. And we headed them off because their plan was to have a high level international nuclear waste dump in WA or South Australia. But the problem of radioactive waste management hasn't gone away, nor have those who are pushing Australia as a site. John White is the advisor to US President George Bush on the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP). He is also an advisor to the Howard government on its Uranium Industry Framework. He's the head of the group called Global Renewables and he believes that Australia should host the world radioactive waste. Hugh Morgan, the former head of Western Mining Corporation and the HR Nichols society is now in a consortium with the former Liberal party and British Conservative party treasurer, Ron Walker, to develop a private nuclear power plant somewhere in Victoria and they want Australia to host international waste. At the federal Liberal Council, in June 2007, there was a resolution passed without comment, challenge or amendment, identifying Australia as the best place in the world to host radioactive waste. John Howard and Alexander Downer, sat there and did not say a word, it passed unanimously.

Now if you join the dots its not a pretty picture. The invitation to join the Bush Administrations global nuclear energy partnership is an invitation to cement the future of our country as the world's uranium quarry and the world's radioactive waste dump. The boomerang was invented in this country and there is a lot of wisdom in that - it's got a better and more effective rate of return than any stock market investment. But what goes out comes back - and what goes out through the Port of Darwin as fuel, comes back if others get their way further down the track, as high level waste. That's not the vision of the future that we share or most people want.

It's not a pretty picture but the good news is it's not an inevitable one. This is a time of challenge and choice. A uranium quarry that fuels regional and global nuclear tensions, the arms race and radioactive waste. A nuclear dump that provides an out of sight and out of mind solution to some for the world's worst industrial waste and lets this highly polluting and irresponsible industry off the hook to further expand and proliferate. Or we can drive solutions. We can drive solutions to the nuclear weapons issue by getting serious about what it means to sit on top of 40% of the world's bomb fuel. We could lead a new international effort to improve, not undermine, safeguards and non-proliferation frameworks. We could move to the adoption of a nuclear weapons convention and lead that. We've got a chemical weapons convention, we've got a biological weapons convention, it is time for a nuclear weapons convention.

We can drive solutions to climate change. We can drive solutions, not dangerous distractions, to climate change. We can promote, apply, use and export the tools that promote a sustainable energy future here, throughout the region. Renewable energy generation and efficient energy use, we can drop the radioactive red herring of nuclear power and be a world leader in renewables not a world loser in nuclear. Now it's a big challenge, its high stakes, there are major institutional barriers and I'm not trying to gloss that it would be in any way easy. It would be a foolish person to do that to an audience that has been as politically active and engaged as you mob for so long.

Over the years though I think that we have shown that the Australian nuclear free movement has influence and has effectiveness. We have 40% of the world's uranium, we've had a decade of an aggressively pro-nuclear government and there are only three operating mines. Now that is not bad in our rip and ship culture. We put a spike in Jabiluka, we derailed the plans for a dump in South Australia and we maintain the story about this industry, its impacts, its threats, its risks, its direct link to the creation and proliferation of the world's worst waste and the world's worst ever weapons. And this has a continuing resonance. The Australian Uranium Association knows that, the PR merchants know that, the PM knows that when the figures come in about how the polling is going about reactors in electorates a couple of months out from an election. We have a strong story to tell.

So it's a time for choice, our decisions on nuclear issues in Australia have a profound resonance in the region and in the world. So let's choose well. Thanks very much.