

HoR Hansard 7 February: QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE Renewable Energy

[Mr ANDREN](#) (2.48 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware of a confidential cooperative research centre report by five CSIRO scientists which reportedly states that solar thermal technology has the capacity to produce Australia's entire current electricity demand and could be cost competitive with coal within seven years? Given that the Newcastle company Solar Heat and Power has been forced to move to the US to obtain development support for this technology, can the PM explain whether this report will be placed on the energy options table? Don't its findings that solar thermal is poised to play a significant role in baseload generation in Australia contradict your assertions that clean coal and nuclear are our only feasible baseload energy options?

[Mr HOWARD](#)—I do not know the detail of that particular study, off the top of my head, but I am perfectly happy to have it examined and put into the mix. I have to say to the honourable member that the view that solar can produce baseload power would be at odds with the overwhelming bulk of scientific opinion.

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[Mr HOWARD](#) (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (3.06 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek the indulgence of the chair to add to an answer.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister may proceed.

[Mr HOWARD](#)—I was asked a question by the member for Calare about base power load generation and I expressed the view that I thought the bulk of scientific opinion was against the proposition he was putting. I would like to quote from a letter—and I am quite happy to table the letter; I think it has been made public already—that was written to me on 21 December 2006 by the Chief Scientist, Dr Jim Peacock. He says, amongst other things, in the letter:

At present there are only two modes of power generation capable of base-load power production which can be operated without serious consequences for climate change emission.

Fossil fuels will be used in Australia now and in the next several decades in power plants. These power plants should be operated with minimum emissions and we have technologies to retrofit most existing power stations so that emissions are reduced. New power stations can be designed to operate with low emissions.

He then goes on to say:

Nuclear power stations are the other clean and mature mode of electricity generation.

In the interests of balance in this debate, they are the words of Dr Jim Peacock, the Chief Scientist. Can I also point out to the House that the company referred to by the member for Calare in his question, Solar Heat and Power Pty Ltd, was successful in gaining a Renewable Energy Development Initiative grant of \$3,254,000 in December of 2005. To date—and that was a few weeks ago—the government has paid \$2.1 million, or 64 per cent, of the grant and the company has stated that it will retain the intellectual property developed so far and continue with Australian management.