

HoR Hansard 13 February 2007: ADJOURNMENT Climate Change

[Mr ANDREN](#) (Calare) (9.10 p.m.)—The politics of climate change have taken some fascinating turns in recent months. There has been a mad scramble by climate sceptics to catch up and there is a \$10 billion water plan, but the state premiers and the PM are still playing politics, all trying to claim the high ground and catch up with the public's growing understanding of the crisis.

This understanding has come, of course, courtesy of the Stern report and Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. It is particularly inconvenient for any government facing an election, as Morris Iemma and John Howard's governments are, caught with their swimming trunks down and no water to swim in. Water, we are now told, is a public asset. A few months back, it was available to the highest bidder as the states and the Commonwealth colluded to flog off the Snowy scheme with its crucial role in town water supply, environmental flow, irrigation requirements and clean hydro-electricity.

The PM says our only clean, green energy options are nuclear and clean coal. Coal may be cleaner one day, we are told, if only we can find out how to dump its emissions underground and keep them there. And given that uranium mining and nuclear energy production generate highly dangerous, indeed deadly, waste, given no nation on earth has a permanent disposal facility for high-level nuclear waste, and further given that the IAEA safeguards system, particularly in relation to countries like China, is critically flawed, will the PM please explain to Australians which part of the nuclear energy cycle is clean, green and safe.

I will tell you about climate in this country—a climate of fear among scientists concerned about their careers if they are seen to be critical of the government's energy priorities. And those priorities are all about fossil fuels, including uranium. Whistleblower Guy Pearce has called for independent and credible economic research to inform the government's policy on energy options and climate change. Professor Pearce points out how stacked in favour of fossil fuels is the government's energy advice. There are conflicts of interest throughout the energy lobby and advisory process.

Until recent days, a report on solar thermal technology, available since late 2005, has been suppressed, despite its five CSIRO authors saying the technology is poised to play a significant role in baseload generation in Australia and could be cost competitive with coal in five to seven years.

Australian company Solar Heat and Power has been forced offshore to seek development funding. Sure, this University of Sydney-developed technology has received a research grant, as the PM told parliament in answer to my question last week, but he was very vague about the solar thermal report, despite being quizzed about the research by Alan Jones in November, all reported by the ABC and Alan Ramsey.

Yet, with a report available that clearly details the big advantages of concentrating on solar thermal—its energy storing capacity, its ability to reduce the overall cost of electricity, its capacity to meet peaking and baseload power, its ability to be used in hybrid configuration with fossil power stations and the absolute suitability of Australia as a solar location—and despite independent studies that the cost of solar thermal will be fully competitive with fossil based power once 5,000 megawatts of capacity is installed, the government did not

want to know about it until it was leaked to the *Canberra Times*, where Roslyn Beeby did such a great job in sticking with the story.

So what is going on? A cosy climate of mates, nudges and winks—the talking up of nuclear with the help of the fossil mafia and nuclear energy interests, the talking up of unproven clean coal, the stripping of solar research funding and the closing of the Energy Research and Development Corporation.

The Prime Minister suggests he wants an open debate on our energy options. He says he is happy to put solar thermal into the mix. Let us also put less vested corporate interest into the alternative energy advisory mix and the water resources mix. Let us put a mandated renewable energy target in place for industry and transport. Let us level the playing field to make uranium and all our fossil fuels fully accountable. Only then will the public accept the political climate change debate as fair dinkum and only then will our researchers be able to confidently do their vital work without fear.