

URANIUM - EXPORTS TO FRANCE

The following appears in Hansard, Debates, Senate 5 March 1984:

URANIUM EXPORTS TO FRANCE

Senator CHIPP— I ask the Minister for Resources and Energy a question. In the light of the Prime Minister's embargo on uranium exports to France in force until October this year, when a shipment of 250 tonnes of uranium is due to go to France, I ask: Is the Minister aware that the French nuclear power industry uses nuclear waste from so-called peaceful reactors for its nuclear bomb program? Is the Minister aware that France has not signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and transfers nuclear materials and technology needed for nuclear bombs to nations such as South Africa, Iraq—which this morning was accused of using chemical warfare—and South Korea? Is the Minister aware that the French Government has firmly restated its intention to continue nuclear testing in the South Pacific? Given that these acts considerably worsen nuclear proliferation and that the only acceptable solution is for France to end nuclear testing in the South Pacific, which it says it will not do, will the Minister take this opportunity to state unequivocally that unless France ceases nuclear testing in the South Pacific for good, Australia will permanently ban uranium exports to France?

Senator WALSH— Senator Chipp listed about half a dozen items which I would regard as being anti-social or even irresponsible, and which he said were practices that the French were currently following. He asked me whether I could confirm this. I cannot confirm whether France follows all of those practices. I cannot remember that off the top of my head but I can confirm a number of the points that Senator Chipp raised, the most importantly of which, I suppose, concerns nuclear testing in the South Pacific. France does follow those practices. For that reason, of course, and principally because of its testing in the South Pacific the Prime Minister and the Government decided last year that the shipment of uranium due to go to France in July 1983 would be postponed and that no shipments would be made, at least until October 1984. Since that date there has been a further Government decision to set up the Slatyer inquiry which is due to report at the end of May. Following receipt of that report, it is anticipated that the decisions will be made regarding the supply or non-supply of uranium to France in the period after October 1984. But until that report has been received and considered by the Government, I think it would be premature of me to make any commitments which seek to bind the Government because the Government has decided to defer those final decisions until the Slatyer report has been received.