

Omnibus Poll

May 2021

Public attitudes to nuclear power in
Australia

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The Australian Institute for Progress exists to advance the discussion, development and implementation of public policy for Australia's future, from its base in Brisbane. The future does not look after itself.

Methodology

The following tables and graphs are based on a sample which has been selected for voting intention based on the results of the last federal election.

Results should be taken as indicative in that the sample is not properly randomised, but it is unlikely that groups are completely unrepresentative.

In these tables we have amalgamated the Australian Shooters and Fishers Party, Christian Democrats, Democratic Labor Party, Katter Australian Party, Liberal Democrats, One Nation, and the United Australia Party as one and labelled them "Nationalist". This is so that we have a statistically significant sample for this group, and because these parties in our sample attract similar voters, with significantly more having voted Liberal or Liberal National previously than have voted Labor. We have amalgamated the Australian Democrats, Animal Justice Party, Informed Medical Options Party, Sustainable Australia Party and the Western Australian Party as "Others" for similar reasons.

The poll was conducted from May 25, 2021 through to June 6, 2021 using our online panel of over 6,000 Australian voters.

Quantitative analysis was undertaken using Microsoft Excel, and responses were weighted for voting intention. Qualitative analysis was undertaken using Leximancer. For the qualitative research respondents were matched for voting intention against the results of the last federal election and selected randomly from their various voting blocs in the proportion those blocs represented in the election results.

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Executive Summary

There are reasonable prospects for convincing a majority of Australians that nuclear power ought to be part of the electricity generation mix. Weighting our results to be in line with voting intention from the last federal election we find that 47% of people support or strongly support nuclear power generation in Australia versus 39% who oppose it.

That leaves 11% who are neutral, and 3% who are undecided. While it is not a majority in favour of nuclear, it is a strong plurality, and for practical intents and purposes the 11% who are neutral can be added to the majority camp.

From a party political point of view Liberals (80% support) and Nationalists (88% support) are the strongest groups to support it, followed by other minor parties (53% support). Independents (63% oppose), ALP (67% oppose) and Greens (86% oppose) are against it.

The ALP has 16% who support, while the LNP has only 6% who oppose. This means that the LNP position is more of a base issue for them, and that the parties from whom they need to win preferences also favour it with Nationalists, for example, being 88% in favour.

So the potential exists to grab a larger share of these voters than normal on this issue. As less than 20% of Greens tend to preference the Coalition, this would appear to be a benefit.

41% of voters overall are more likely to vote for a party that supported nuclear, versus 38% less likely. Again the increase in support is strongest amongst Liberal and Nationalist voters, although "Other" minor parties also are more likely to support a party that supports nuclear.

Opposition to nuclear further decreases when small modular reactors are put into the mix with 33% across the sample being more likely to support nuclear if it were restricted to this type of reactor and only 14% less likely. The largest effects were in Liberal Party and Nationalist segments, but there were small effects in the ALP, Greens, Others and Independent segments.

This all has to be viewed in the context of 59% of voters thinking of anthropomorphic global warming as being an existential threat, while only 31% disagree. Labor (95%) and Greens (97%) were the most strongly convinced. Nationalists were the least convinced (89% disagree) with Liberals sitting in the middle (57% disagree versus 24% agree).

Labor can talk to electors in completely unnuanced terms about climate change because their base is secure, and their opponents are split. The Coalition needs an approach which doesn't alienate either side. Given these results nuclear gives them that approach, so we would expect it to increase in importance in the national debate.

It is clear reading the verbatims that there are two motivations for supporting nuclear – one is fear of climate change, and the other is technological agnosticism coupled with a desire for a reliable grid. There are four main reasons for opposing nuclear – safety, waste disposal, cost, and that it will displace clean energy solutions such as wind and solar.

How strongly would you support or oppose the generation of nuclear power in Australia?

	ALP	LP	GRN	Nationalist	Other	Ind	Total
Strongly support	4%	58%	1%	72%	34%	13%	31%
Support	13%	22%	5%	16%	19%	7%	16%
Neither support nor oppose	13%	11%	7%	4%	7%	13%	11%
Oppose	20%	3%	14%	1%	30%	8%	10%
Strongly oppose	47%	4%	72%	7%	10%	55%	29%
Unsure	4%	2%	1%	1%	0%	3%	3%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total support	16%	80%	6%	88%	53%	20%	47%
Total oppose	67%	6%	86%	8%	40%	63%	39%
Net support	-50%	74%	-80%	80%	13%	-43%	8%

n=981

The parliamentary committee recommended that the government only consider “fourth generation reactors”, such as small modular reactors, similar to the reactors in nuclear-powered ships. Does this make you more, or less likely, to support, or oppose the generation of nuclear power in Australia?

	ALP	LP	GRN	Nationalist	Other	Ind	Total
Much more likely	4%	25%	3%	54%	17%	7%	17%
More likely	14%	23%	13%	7%	7%	8%	16%
Neither more nor less likely	53%	40%	55%	30%	47%	53%	46%
Less likely	8%	4%	6%	4%	29%	7%	6%
Much less likely	15%	0%	19%	2%	0%	17%	8%
Unsure	7%	9%	4%	3%	0%	8%	7%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total more likely	18%	47%	16%	61%	24%	15%	33%
Total less likely	23%	4%	25%	6%	29%	23%	14%
Net more likely	-5%	44%	-10%	55%	-6%	-8%	19%

Would you be more, or less, likely to support a political party that advocated a role for nuclear energy in Australia's electricity generation mix?

	ALP	LP	GRN	Nationalist	Other	Ind	Total
Much more likely	3%	43%	1%	67%	17%	10%	25%
More likely	9%	28%	4%	15%	31%	8%	17%
Neither more nor less likely	21%	22%	12%	11%	14%	12%	19%
Less likely	22%	4%	18%	4%	33%	14%	13%
Much less likely	42%	2%	64%	4%	5%	51%	25%
Unsure	3%	1%	1%	0%	0%	5%	2%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total more likely	12%	71%	5%	82%	48%	19%	41%
Total less likely	64%	6%	82%	7%	38%	64%	38%
Net more likely	-52%	65%	-77%	74%	10%	-46%	3%

How strongly do you agree or disagree that man's emissions of CO2 constitute an existential threat to the continued existence of humans and needs to be addressed as an urgent problem?

	ALP	LP	GRN	Nationalist	Other	Ind	Total
Strongly agree	82%	9%	93%	2%	83%	73%	47%
Agree	13%	15%	6%	5%	2%	8%	12%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	16%	0%	4%	0%	3%	8%
Disagree	0%	20%	0%	6%	0%	2%	9%
Strongly disagree	1%	37%	1%	83%	15%	13%	23%
Unsure	1%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total agree	96%	24%	98%	7%	85%	82%	59%
Total disagree	1%	57%	1%	89%	15%	15%	31%
Net agree	95%	-33%	97%	-81%	70%	67%	28%

How strongly would you support or oppose the generation of nuclear power in Australia?



Verbatims

Like the proposed gas fired power station for the Hunter region, I trust the advice of energy experts who tell us that these technologies are unnecessarily expensive and unnecessary to fulfil our need for electricity, now that renewable generation has 'come of age'. The problems with nuclear technology remain unresolved and it will be damaging to divert the resources that should be fully committed to bringing in the renewable revolution to these problematic alternatives.

Nuclear reactors have supplied electricity around the world for years and are being built at an expanding rate, They are a safe way to produce power yet for some emotional connection to bombs the population in Australia seems to be frightened of them. Thousands of miners have been killed through accidents and ill health in the production of coal, yet somehow that is accepted.

The nuclear option will bleed significant funds away from cheaper options, and take a much longer time to deploy than renewable energy. Pursuing a nuclear generation option will have the effect of keeping the current fossil fuel generators operating for longer, resulting in emissions that could easily be avoided.

It makes no economic sense, given that solar and wind with enough storage to be firm capacity are about HALF the most optimistic estimate of the likely price of electricity from a nuclear power station. It would also pose the serious problem of managing the radioactive waste for geological time...

Without a credible energy policy on the table and the disastrous management of coal fired power stations by the Government (not the operation but the positioning of fossil fuel power generation) the country is now left with a possible introduction of Nuclear Power. Solar, wind, hydro, tide and other sustainable power sources are being left to wobble around without solid Govt guidance.

If CO2 is continued to be seen as an issue: nuclear power is a logical choice to power our industries and communities as renewables are not reliable nor are they cheap. If CO2 is properly seen as to be our friend (and not the cause of any climate change): we should stick with using our affordable and reliable fossil fuels whilst R&D continues on developing renewable solutions

I have long opposed nuclear power as a source for generating electricity, because of the fundamental problem associated with nuclear waste. My only reservation is ensuring that we have the energy sources to replace fossil fuels.

In the time it takes to commission and build a nuclear reactor significant improvements in alternative energy sources will be occurring. Energy sources like fossil fuels, nuclear etc need to take into account the costs

associated with their risks and pollution, which would more clearly show that economically and socially renewables are better choices

The recent power station failure highlighted the need for reliable base like power supply. Nuclear power stations are both able to provide that base line power and also the amount of waste produced is minimal in comparison to coal and there is no Co2 emitted from a nuclear power station.

Nuclear waste is a chronic unsolved problem and dumping it rurally is crazy. Renewable energies are cheap and relatively non-polluting so adopting nukes which are the most dangerous and polluting in the long term is mad.

With the advances in nuclear reactors it would be safe enough and environmentally friendly enough but we just don't need it as the developments of renewable energy sources like solar and wind coupled to large battery storage remove the need for all non-renewables.

Because all the evidence is that modern nuclear generation is vary safe despite the nonsense talked by the "anti"s. I think that Lomborg's criticisms of the viability of wind/solar need to be taken a lot more seriously rather than blindly following "the religion".

it maybe the case that nuclear power is more sustainable and less damaging than coal but with the ever increasing technological advances in renewables and storage and the time and expense nuclear power would take to establish it has no future. it just so mining companies can dig stuff out of the ground and profit

From what I have heard, without even considering the dangers that could accompany a nuclear power plant, it would be very expensive and take many years before it was on stream. We could use that time and money to improve renewable energy.

We don't need it - we have staggeringly abundant wind and solar energy resources, and if they're backed up by hydro and battery storage, then we don't need nuclear. And sure, there're no carbon emissions from nuclear, but you still have to deal with the radioactive waste.

I don't have a strong opinion on the tech in general but absolutely not in Australia – we have more than we need in terms of energy generation from renewable sources and there is zero reason to even consider nuclear.

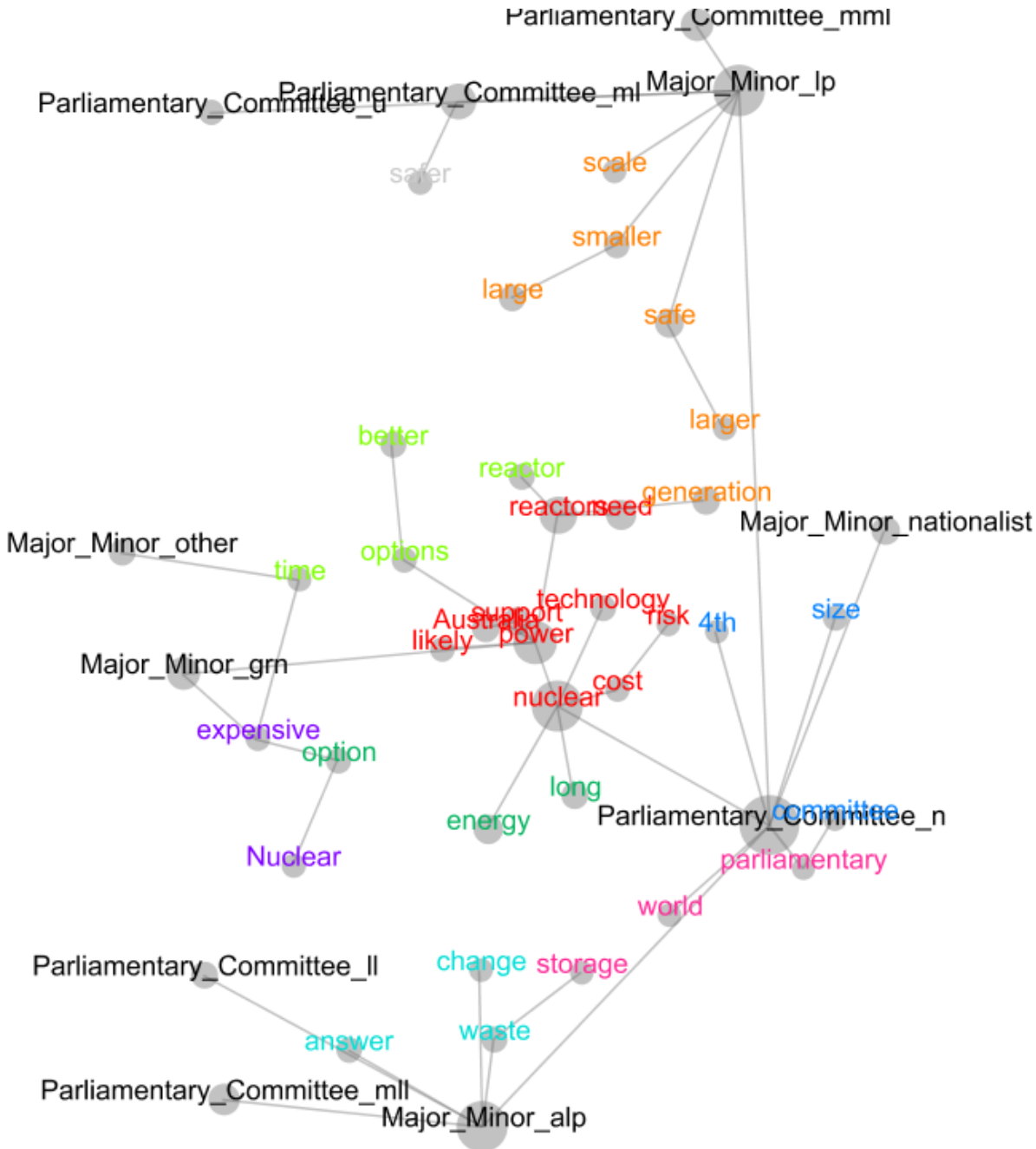
Strongly support in principle, but not at the expense of cheap clean coal-fired electricity generation. Getting nuclear going will be a long-term and expensive prospect, and will be bedevilled by shouty lawfare from the benighted Greens.

Nuclear power generators are potentially very dangerous in terms of accidents, potential for nuclear warfare, and the inability to dispose of waste safely. There are far better renewable energy alternatives.

what State is going to take the waste? who want's to live next door to reactor? Wind, solar, battery technology. everyone counts for a nuclear free Australia, are we gearing up for 1984 again?

There is no prospect in sight for the safe storage of nuclear waste and, as Fukushima showed most recently, safe nuclear power stations are a myth. The problem is that we use too much energy.

The parliamentary committee recommended that the government only consider “fourth generation reactors”, such as small modular reactors, similar to the reactors in nuclear-powered ships. Does this make you more, or less likely, to support, or oppose the generation of nuclear power in Australia?



Verbatims

Question is not well put: my answer is it makes it more likely for me to support nuclear energy - the reason being that these reactors are simpler, easier and faster to deploy taking away my major objection against in #19. Support is still conditional on the reactor technology being mature, the benefits not overstated and the cost of electricity competitive to renewable resources.

Fourth generation reactors are still in the drawing board and there is no credible estimate of either when they could be delivered or what their electricity would cost, but it is very unlikely to be anywhere near the cost of large-scale solar and wind with storage. There is also a real risk that our embracing nuclear power, in the absence of an economic argument, would alarm our neighbours and start a nuclear arms race in the region.

Unfortunately a small opening like this is only likely to lead later politician's expanding it to full nuclear power. If nuclear power was the answer, why aren't countries like the US and UK rushing to rapidly expand their nuclear programs as the solution to climate? Nuclear power is also an expensive option compared to other non polluting power sources.

The only people seriously proposing nuclear power are climate change deniers who just can't, can't, can't bring themselves to publicly support wind and solar, so they throw nuclear up as an option to make it look as though they are doing something. Besides, I can't imagine anyone in Australia wanting to live next to one of these reactors, and it's for sure that Barnaby Joyce and Matt Canavan won't.

As long as the 4th generation reactors are efficient and results comparable i.e. energy costs lower, I would support nuclear power in Australia.

Australia wouldn't need a large reactor in one place but a series of smaller reactors closer to where the power is needed in order to reduce transmission loss.

I have no apprehension about safety of nuclear power stations. However "Not In My Backyard" pressure will no doubt be great in main populated areas, so small modular reactors in remote areas will likely have an easier time.

I understand that 'modular reactors' bypass some of the problems of larger reactors, but the nuclear fuel cycle is not a cycle but a source of extremely long term pollution. Dealing with that is only one of the problematic features of this technology.

I have strong reservations about nuclear power regardless of the size of the reactors, given that nuclear waste will still be a byproduct.

As long as the technology is modern generation. All the nuclear incidents around the world have been due to older, less safe technologies.

Just too scary - simple madness that we could even contemplate this type of energy source - think of the four major disasters that we have had already. Not just expensive, but large number of Deaths, long term radiation impacts and also the huge costs of reparations and cleanups

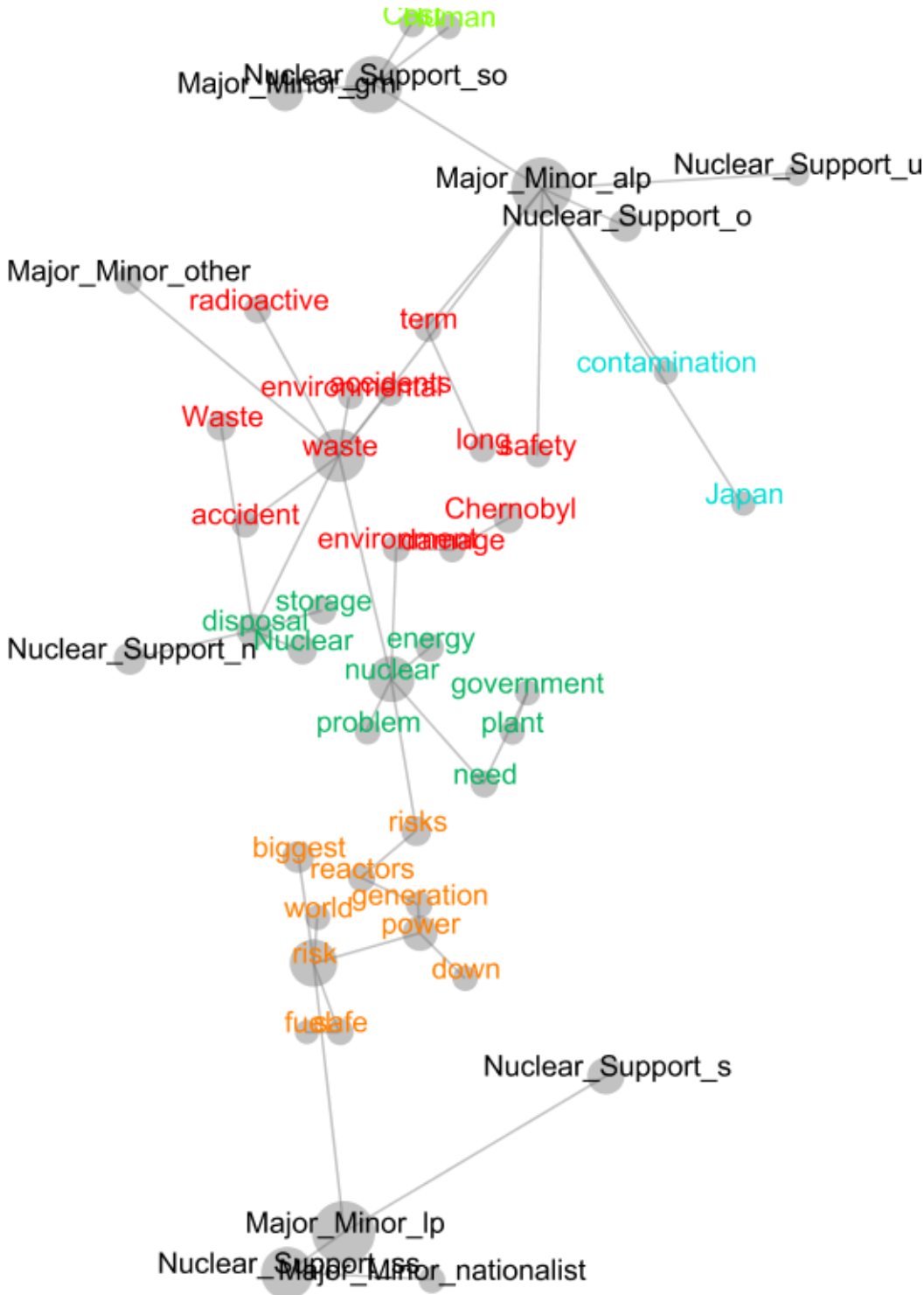
The structural arrangements for delivery of nuclear power is a matter requiring expert advice and consultation. I do not consider any parliamentary committee should be making decisions on this especially since we have no nuclear power at present.

I'm just totally against this - we have renewable options for generating energy and there is no need for nuclear in any form. The only reason would be ideological opposition to renewables from people in power.

The problem with the establishment of a nuclear power station is the lag time from the decision to the power production of the plant, 10 to 20 years would be a conservative figure. The modular design is able to be established in a vastly more timely manner.

We need big reactors that can take us into an era where renewable sources can provide all our power apart from some backup nuclear.

Thinking about the possibility of nuclear power generation in Australia, irrespective of whether you support it or not, in a short paragraph please tell us what would be the biggest risk from it?



I think the biggest risk is that we lock in infrastructure and invest in this at the cost of better options for renewables and cement in another group of vested interests that will block sensible transition to renewables and the tech to make that work for Australians. I do think all nuclear energy contains risks but don't know enough about 4th generation to answer this based on the tech that is being recommended, I think Australia is one of the safest places for storage but any risk from nuclear and damage to the environment however well it can be managed is not worth it because we do not need this at all.

Traditional reactors continue to have waste problems - however the biggest risk in my view is that nuclear power generation will at the very least delay, and possibly stall, a transition to zero emissions electricity generation because of the amount of capital involved, the need for government subsidies, and the non design, approval and build cycles.

The biggest risk is the waste generated which is harmful to the environment, challenging to store in the very long term - the risks are not worth it when there are cleaner and safer options. Frankly also, in the time it would take to set up nuclear generators, sustainable renewable energy sources will have continued to develop in sophisticated and more efficient ways.

Politics. As a scientist (Metallurgist - a practical applied science) I am aware that the risks of Nuclear power are minimal - no-one builds the unstable RBMK reactors other than the Russians (Chernobyl) and Fukushima was a result of the tsunami being greater than envisaged and having the backup diesel generators at ground level which cut off supplies to continue the shut down process which commenced when the earthquake.

Security of the plant (from sabotage, etc), safety (leaks, earthquake damage, etc) and disposal of radio active waste. Well recall the anger about wanting to store radio active waste from medical and other practices in the Brisbane area some years ago and also the search for an Australian site (? yet to be resolved) that was acceptable and safe.

The biggest risk in the short term is that it would result in Indonesia developing nuclear weapons as an understandable response. The obvious longer term risk is the problem of managing radioactive waste.

It's either how we deal with the waste or how long before it breaks down and causes an environmental disaster like Fukushima or Chernobyl. Latter depends on design, on going management longer term.

Waste disposal (including direct mine spoil & tailings dams) Uses & contaminates valuable fresh water Proliferation of nuclear waste & weapons globally to dangerous factions.

Economic and environmental risks of nuclear power are unnecessary in Australia as we can generate energy from renewable resources if only we tried hard enough.

Meltdown and storage. But I'm sure there are many other successful nuclear reactors around the world that operate and deal with their waste in proper ways.

Our biggest current risk is a lack of waste storage for all radioactive material produced by Australia. All our end to end use of radioactive material requires the final step - waste storage.

Risk of accidents (Chernobyl, 3-Mile Island, Fukushima) - but these are small compared to the years of trouble free operation of nuclear power plants around the world.

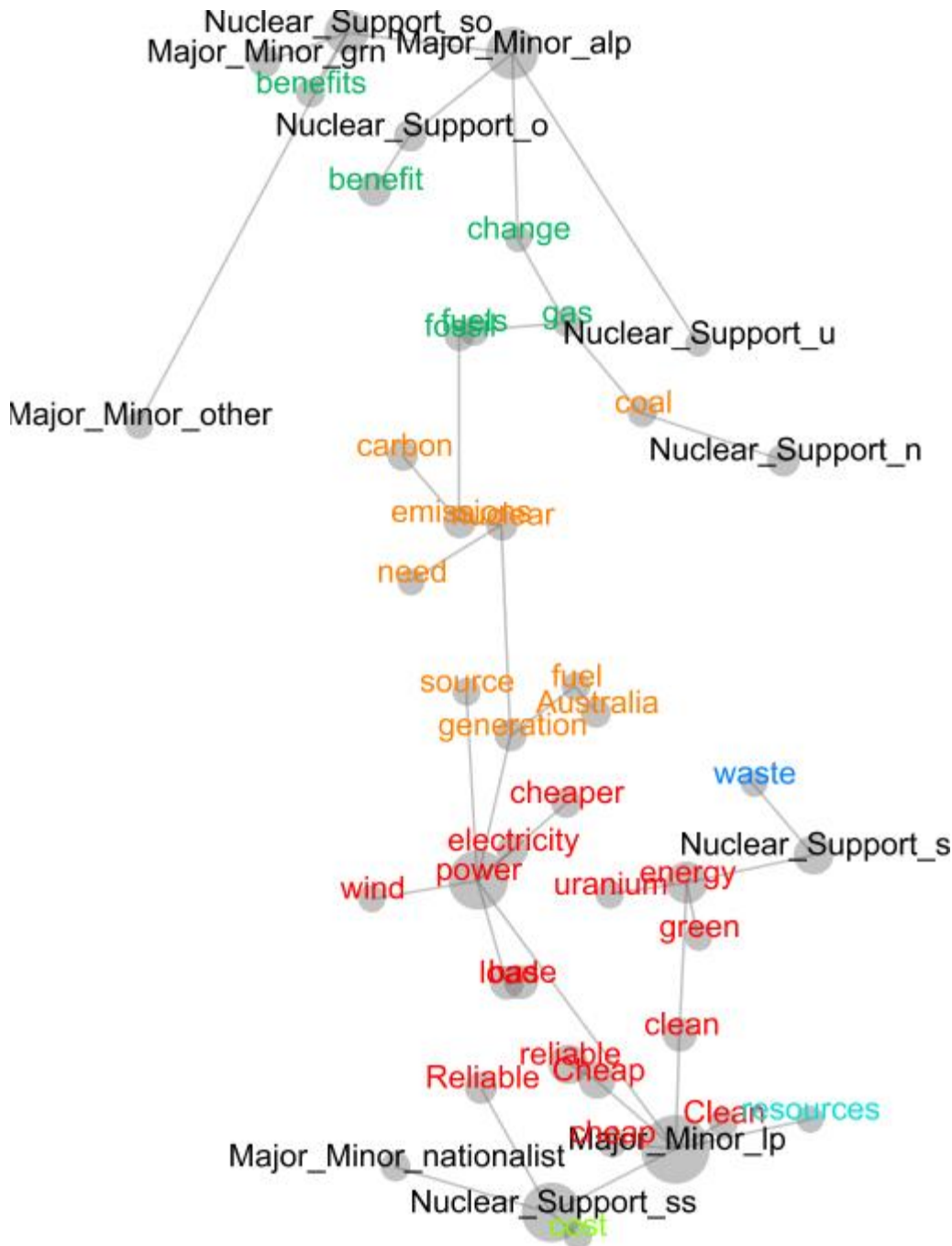
Health risks Long term disposal of waste People just too incompetent to be let loose with high risk things

Cost and risk of nuclear damage US Japan and Russia have all had significant nuclear fallouts some due to nature but others manmade

It is complete BS to claim that nuclear power can curb greenhouse emissions as mining uranium is highly energy intensive. There are thousands of components in running and maintaining nuclear power stations, not the mention the accidents and threat to workers safety & environment.

Chernobyl was a man-made problem which sufficient monitoring of build and running should eliminate. The government will need a board of men (and women) of high integrity to be controllers of the whole, both during build and running day to day power generation.

Thinking about the possibility of nuclear power generation in Australia, irrespective of whether you support it or not, in a short paragraph please tell us what would be the biggest benefit from it?



Verbatims

The greatest benefit is that it provides a solid support for the 'base load' on the electricity grid. It also enables Australia to fall in line with the global push to meet 'targets' which will supposedly stop 'climate change'.

There is no real benefit to nuclear power generation in Australia. Wind power is cheaper and if implemented correctly possibly more disperse and therefore more reliable.

Getting energy without the level of green house gas emissions that we have from current fossil fuels. That is a significant benefit—but in Australia we can get that without nuclear.

Reliable base load electricity around the clock and in any season with the added benefit of zero emissions.

Reliable base load power at cheaper cost and less enviromental damage than wind, solar or hydrogen.

We in Australia have abundant reserves of fuel for nuclear reactors. We could have a world advantage in affordable and reliable energy generation.

Cheap and clean energy that would provide based loan power generation that would be reliable.

Offsetting carbon emissions, as an alternative to fossil fuel generation of power.

Australia has access to its own uranium and could generate a lot of power with less potential damage to the overall environment than burning fossil fuels

Clean, cost effective, reliable base load power and wouldn't be Govt subsidised.

Reliable supplies with nil carbon dioxide and nil smoke emissions. France with some 80% of its power supplied by Nuclear systems has very clean air.

If small modular reactors are mature and truely have the benefits they are said to have, nuclear power generation could provide an option where battery storage does not provide enough capacity and where other long term storage options such as pumped hydro are uncompetitive.

I do not see a genuine benefit from nuclear power generation (though maybe the electricity generated might count).

Clean and green energy source. Loads of power so will make it cheaper for all too.

Cheap reliable and clean energy- Australia has an abundance of uranium.... how could you not support it.

Safe, reliable, cheap dispatchable energy. Our nation will again be an industrial, resources, ag-business giant fuelled by Thorium.