

Nuclear debate should be held in communities, Coalition says, amid political hit job claims

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The Coalition fears Labor – who it has accused of stacking the committee with Labor MPs – will use a new committee to ramp up fears against nuclear energy leading up to the election.



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NSW

The Coalition has accused Labor of setting up a new committee to run a political hit job on nuclear energy, with shadow energy spokesman Ted O'Brien saying MPs sitting on the committee should hold face-to-face meetings with regional communities where proposed reactors would be built.

Labor last week suddenly announced a house select committee to explore the deployment of nuclear power, due to report back by April 30 – just weeks before a probable federal election.

But the Coalition fears Labor – who it has accused of stacking the committee with Labor MPs – will use the committee to ramp up fears against nuclear energy leading up to the election.



Shadow energy minister Ted O'Brien during Question Time at Parliament House in Canberra. Picture: NewsWire / Martin Ollman

The Coalition has been holding face-to-face meetings with the communities where it plans to build seven nuclear reactors if winning the election, with shadow energy spokesman Mr O'Brien saying committee members should too.

“The parliamentary committee on nuclear energy must hold face-to-face hearings on the ground in communities earmarked to host zero-emissions nuclear power plants,” he said.

“Despite this process starting out as a cynical political manoeuvre by Labor, the Coalition has agreed to engage in good faith and welcomes the opportunity for further grassroots engagement in regional communities.”

Mr O'Brien said local residents of the areas earmarked to host power plants deserved to be “front and centre” of the inquiry.

The committee will be led by Labor's Hunter MP Dan Repacholi, with the probe to look at how uranium would be transported, enriched, stored and supplied, as well deployment time frames, and impacts on water and electricity affordability.



Emission funnels for the Bayswater coal-powered thermal power station located near the town of Muswellbrook, near where the Coalition is proposing a nuclear power station. Photo: DAVID GRAY / AFP

Mr O'Brien said prior research showed 77 per cent of coal plant workers can “can seamlessly transition to a zero-emissions nuclear power plant, in their existing occupations”.

“This means workers’ experience and skills are leveraged, they keep enjoying well paid jobs, their families stay in the same home, the kids at the same school, and their social networks remain intact,” he said.

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