

Nuclear Power in Australia
Special Presentation by Dr Ziggy Switkowski, Chairman, ANSTO
17 July 2007, Minter Ellison, Sydney

Dr Ziggy Switkowski gave a special presentation on the future of nuclear power in Australia to Syndicate 45 and invited guests in Sydney on 17 July 2007. Dr Switkowski is the chairman of the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) and a former CEO of Telstra, Optus and Kodak (Australasia). He is also currently a non executive director of Suncorp, Tabcorp, Healthscope and Opera Australia. Last year he chaired the Prime Minister's Review of Uranium Mining, Processing, and Nuclear Energy.

In his talk, Dr Switkowski outlined some of the statistics on the generation and use of nuclear power around the world. He cited the example of France where 50 reactors were built in 15 years and now produce about 80% of the country's electricity. He also looked at how the debate over nuclear power had progressed since the Government initiated the nuclear energy Taskforce in 2006. For example, initial submissions primarily raised three objections: the difficulties of managing nuclear waste, the potential for catastrophes like Chernobyl and the threat of nuclear facilities as terrorist targets. While there are still strong public concerns over how nuclear waste is managed, the debate is now more likely to include discussion about the costs and time needed to develop and produce nuclear power, and where a reactor could be located. Dr Switkowski attributed this change to the increasing acceptance of nuclear energy as a necessary response to climate change.

In addressing some of the concerns surrounding the safety of nuclear power, Ziggy spoke about the precise tracking and monitoring of nuclear waste. He also looked at some of the internal and external threats to nuclear reactors, including earthquakes and terrorist bombs, and argued that in modern facilities - like the new Opal reactor at Lucas Heights - these could, at the very worst, cause the facility to shut down. Ziggy also spoke about this facility as an example of Australia's ability to develop and deliver leading technology on time and on budget. Within about 15 years, with a carbon trading scheme in place, nuclear could offer one of the cheapest, lowest emitting and, he argued, safest forms of power generation in Australia.

Finally, Switkowski looked at the issue of climate change and argued that Australia should encourage major international players to look at solutions which include carbon capture and geosequestration. He also posed the following questions in relation to climate change: What is the proper role for government? Is global warming *the* issue for our generation? Should we put more emphasis on renewable energies? And finally, should we accept the proposal of Nicholas Stern and others that a percentage of our GDP should be invested in addressing climate change.

This event was hosted by Minter Ellison. Read Minter Ellison's report on the Nuclear Energy Taskforce outcomes and findings here [\[link to report\]](#)