

Donald Trump parts company with Australia and UK on energy

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Earlier this month Donald Trump stormed to victory in the US presidential election.

On November 16, Trump announced he would appoint Chris Wright as his new secretary of energy. He would take office when Trump assumes the presidential mantle on January 20.

Wright is more than an interesting selection. He is presently CEO of Liberty Energy, a Denver-based oil and gas fracking company. He is also a non-executive director of Oklo, an up-and-coming nuclear technology company.

Energy policy is where Australia is likely to part company with the US as well as the UK.

The US is developing its nuclear industry with the latest technologies including small modular reactors and micro-reactors. Under Trump, the US will also establish a National Energy Council that will work to establish US energy dominance around the world.

Trump's selection of Wright stands in contrast to Keir Starmer's appointment of Ed Miliband as energy secretary in the UK following the general election there in July this year.

Starmer has declared that the UK would reduce its emissions to net zero by the end of the century and, like Australia, would aim to become a "clean energy superpower".

Both the UK and Australia now have an ambition to be clean energy superpowers. However, they are going about it very differently.

The UK strategy includes a new state-owned company, Great British Energy (GBE). Another state-owned company, Great British Nuclear (GBN), will continue in the [specialist field of nuclear energy](#). GBE and GBN will work alongside each other.

The British and US governments announced at COP29 in Baku this week that they would speed up the development of nuclear technology as part of the Generation IV International Forum.

It was also apparently suggested that Australia could be expected join these efforts from March next year. Australian Energy Minister Chris Bowen has dissociated himself from this initiative.

The Albanese government has a disdainful attitude toward the uranium and nuclear industries. This strikes me as hypocritical.

The former Howard government clearly blundered by allowing a ban on nuclear energy projects to be inserted in Australia's environmental legislation.

The Peter Dutton-led Opposition would now like to repeal the ban but the Albanese government seems unwilling to co-operate because it might cost votes at the next election, to be held in the first half of 2025.

Australia is internationally recognised for its expertise in production of medical products through the ANSTO nuclear research reactor at Lucas Heights near Sydney.

Australia is also recognised for its regulatory expertise through the Australian Regulatory Protection and Nuclear and Scientific Agency (ARPANSA).

Australia has established a regulatory regime to allow for the AUKUS submarines to be repaired and maintained in Australia.

However, Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen has told the National Press Club that, so long as he had anything to do with it, Australia would have nothing to do with nuclear energy in its power system.

Many people are puzzled by Bowen's position. It does not sit well with Australia's AUKUS defence treaty partners the UK and the US.

Peter Dutton's Liberal National Party coalition is keen to use nuclear power as a method of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Nuclear power doesn't need to stand in the way of renewable energy technologies.

In December 2023, Australia and other participants in the UN Climate Conference in Dubai (COP 28), affirmed their commitment to achieve "net zero" greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Dutton seems to think that 2024 may be a good year for Australia to reactivate the case for a technology-neutral energy policy. He may be right.

Renewables make a lot of sense in sunny Australia but need to be supported by storage technologies and transported to centres of demand. This imposes additional costs.

Nuclear power is used for electricity generation in more than 30 countries.

The AUKUS initiative has guaranteed that Australia will use nuclear energy for submarine propulsion. Surely nuclear energy should now also be considered for civil nuclear generation?

In the US, small-scale, mobile nuclear reactors are at an advanced stage of development as a strategic asset to back up onshore power supply to the US military.

It should now be feasible for the Australian mining industry to install mobile nuclear microreactors across its vast mining landscape. To pursue this, Australia would need to repeal its archaic ban on nuclear power.

Diverse technology is the key to bridging the gap between the climate problem and the climate solution – it is the key to the success of the entire energy transition.

Trump's nomination of Wright as the new US secretary of energy is a signal that Australia should align itself with what the US is planning.

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