



THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEW WITH SABRA LANE
ABC RADIO PM PROGRAM**

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SUBJECTS: Beverley uranium mine expansion approval

MARK COLVIN: Exactly thirty years ago, Peter Garrett's band, Midnight Oil, played their first big anti uranium mining benefit concert at Sydney Town Hall. From 1978 to 2008, Mr Garrett's translation from rock rebel to political pragmatist appears complete today after he gave the Ministerial go ahead for the expansion of the Beverley uranium mine in South Australia. He said he had sought assurances from the CSIRO and the country's Chief Scientist that the expansion would be safe and would meet worlds best practice. The Environment Minister says the Government set a range of conditions to make sure that the mine does not hurt the environment.

Peter Garrett spoke to Sabra Lane about the decision

GARRETT: Well, I have said yes because the proposal won't produce any adverse significant impacts on matters of national environment significance and as well as that, in terms of nuclear actions generally, we have set a range of conditions which have got to be met by the proponent to ensure that there is the proper protection of the environment generally - no compromise in terms of the treatment of groundwater and a satisfactory containment of the mine process including disposal of the waste. And we have done that to fulfil the Government's commitment to worlds best practice. I have taken advice from the CSIRO, from Geosciences Australia and I took additional advice, following that, from the Chief Scientist as well, to make absolutely sure that the proposed action that had come forward to me for consideration, with the conditions attached to it, would meet worlds best practice and I am satisfied that it does.

LANE: OK, well we will get back to those conditions in a moment. How much more will it be allowed to produce and economically how much value will that add to Australia's bottom line?

GARRETT: Well this particular approval doesn't add any additional volumes, it maintains the existing volume approval that Beverley mine was going to actually deliver. It allows for a greater area to be accessed in order to get those volumes up, and so what it is really about is an additional area that the proponent is seeking but the same volume that was already in place.

LANE: The company that operates the mine, Heathgate Resources, uses a very controversial method of mining. Experts say the chemical used in this leeching process can contaminate ground water supplies. Some claim that it is leaving behind a liquid nuclear waste dump. You have talked about extra checks and balances, exactly what are they?

GARRETT: Well look the first thing to say is that I wanted to satisfy myself from the advice from CSIRO and from Geosciences and confirmed by the Chief Scientist, that in fact the *in situ* disposals process that is used there was the worlds best practice for this site and that is the advice that I have received. The key to ensuring that in fact the dispersal of the effects of the mining operation, in terms of where you actually store that material afterwards, is that it is contained safely and properly and monitored properly for significant periods of time. And the advice from our scientific bodies is that that is the case given the geological formations here in Beverley.

LANE: But this mine has had problems with leaks in the past?

GARRETT: Look, there have been a number of matters that the mine proponent have had to address in the past in terms of operating the mine. I am satisfied that in my role as Environment Minister we have set out what we think are the absolute necessary sets of conditions and I have got every expectation, because it will be something which will be determined and regulated effectively by the South Australian Government, that that will be done satisfactorily and that the proponent will meet those requirements.

LANE: How does this decision sit with you? You have campaigned against uranium mining for a long, long, long time and last year you opposed the Labor Party's policy to expand the three mines policy. How does it sit with you?

GARRETT: Well look, this is a matter which has been pretty strenuously canvassed over time and my views about this issue have been well known and I did oppose, at the conference the change in policy, but I also made it clear that if it was the democratic will of the Party that the policy would change and that was the Government's policy position then I would support it. I do. I am a Cabinet Minister and as a consequence of my role as effectively a decision maker, I see my task now as to make sure that we set the best possible environment standards we can, not only for this particular proposal but for all those proposals that come to me under the relevant legislation that I am discharged the responsibility.

LANE: Putting it in rather crude terms people are going to say that you are going to have to suck this up.

GARRETT: Well, you know, I think the fact of the matter is that I came into the Parliament to be the best environment minister I could if I got that opportunity and I was privileged enough to get that opportunity, so I intend to do that. I came in to be a team player. I came in, as with any political party, there are a range of views that people hold within the party but once the party comes to a view and the Government comes to a view in terms of what its policy position is, then of course we'll prosecute that view but we will do it, and I will do it as Minister, in a way which ensures that the best environmental standards can be met.

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