

# Liberals to seek 'social licence' for nuclear...

By Phillip Coorey Political editor

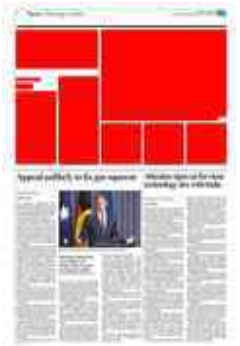
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## Liberals to seek 'social licence' for nuclear power

Phillip Coorey  
Political editor

### Modular reactors

A push by the Coalition to adopt nuclear energy will "fall dead" unless a broad consensus for support can be achieved, new shadow energy minister Ted O'Brien says.

As Liberal leader Peter Dutton and Nationals leader David Littleproud backed an examination of nuclear power, Mr O'Brien said while his immediate focus was the gas and energy crisis, his longer-term mission would be to build support for nuclear energy.

"When we get to discuss the prospect of nuclear energy, a social licence is the number one prerequisite – a broad consensus is required," he told *The Australian Financial Review*.

"It's a discussion the nation should have at the right time but right now, we have a new government that has promised to decrease electricity bills, and they're fumbling with a gas crisis."

Mr Dutton promoted Mr O'Brien from the backbench to the shadow

ministry, in large part because of Mr O'Brien's experience in chairing a parliamentary inquiry after which he came down strongly in favour of small, modular reactors.

Mr O'Brien believes the modular reactors should form part of the solution in providing low-emission, reliable energy.

He was not advocating old-style, large nuclear power stations.

"Nobody wants old Soviet technology. You wouldn't touch it with a barge pole," he said.

Mr Dutton, who has promised disgruntled conservatives that under his leadership there would be product differentiation with Labor, said yesterday nuclear power must be explored.

"I'm not afraid to have a discussion on nuclear if we want to have legitimate emissions reductions. If we want to lower electricity prices, then that is exactly the path that [French] President [Emmanuel] Macron has embarked on, and Prime Minister [Boris] Johnson is talking about in the UK," Mr Dutton said.

"I fear the current government has resorted to higher electricity prices and

less energy security... I don't think we should be afraid of talking about a technology that's going to have the ability to reduce emissions and electricity prices, so it's something we can consider in time. But I don't think we should rule them out because it's not fashionable to talk about them."

Mr Littleproud said: "There needs now to be a conversation about nuclear. Over the next five to 10 years, we have the opportunity to look at new technology ... and see whether that can be done in Australia to reduce emissions to give us baseload power, to complement renewables, but also to invest in those traditional industries as well."

He agreed nuclear energy had an image problem.

"We did extensive polling and understood that it wasn't as popular because ... people were getting their information from what they saw on Chernobyl, Fukushima, and also the Simpsons."

The Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) released a poll it commissioned which asked people whether they agreed to

the following statement: "Australia should build nuclear power plants to supply electricity and reduce carbon emissions."

Of the respondents, 53 per cent agreed, 23 per cent disagreed and 24 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.

"Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Opposition Leader Peter Dutton should come together and show leadership to repeal the ban on nuclear power ... which can provide low-cost and reliable baseload power," said Daniel Wild, director of research at the IPA.



Fighting nuclear power's image problem: the Coalition's new energy spokesman, Ted O'Brien. PHOTO: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN