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Media release

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Westernport Bay and Port Stephens identified as ideal nuclear sites

Westernport Bay in Victoria and Port Stephens in NSW are likely candidates as the site for Australia's first nuclear power plant, according to analysis by the Australia Institute.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that he anticipates Australia will develop a nuclear power industry in the coming decades and has flagged an inquiry into the feasibility of the proposed new industry.

After consulting a number of energy experts, the Institute has identified several sites on the east coast that meet the main criteria for the siting of a nuclear power plant.

The most important of these is that the site be on the coast, so as to provide access for the very large volumes of cooling water that a major nuclear power station would need. An inland site would not be feasible, because Australia's inland water supplies are unreliable and are already over-committed. Even a country like Canada, with its cool climate and abundance of freshwater, has built its nuclear power stations either on the shores of the Great Lakes or on major rivers.

Other criteria which Westernport Bay and Port Stephens meet include:

- They are near major transmission lines, so that there is not a large additional cost of connecting to the national grid.
- They have proximity to a major load centres (Melbourne and Sydney-Newcastle).
- They have good rail and port access for transport of imported fuel rods.

While fresh fuel rods would be imported, spent fuel will need to be stored in perpetuity. In Europe, nuclear power stations are often required to store the radioactive waste on site.

"It is not clear whether the Government has yet considered where the proposed nuclear power plants will be located, but there are only a limited number of suitable sites. Other likely sites include the Central Coast and the area south of Wollongong in NSW, the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, and Port Phillip Bay and Portland in Victoria", said Dr Clive Hamilton, executive director of the Australia Institute.

"The Prime Minister has said he wants a national debate about nuclear power, but there is little point in debating it in the abstract", he said.