

HOWARD CLEARS WAY FOR NUCLEAR POWER

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PRIME Minister John Howard will today give the green light to nuclear power by declaring an immediate start to the preparation of reactor designs and regulations.

In a move calculated to precede Labor's national conference debate on uranium mining this afternoon, Mr Howard also will signal the swift removal of federal laws blocking the development of nuclear power plants.

This will mean nuclear reactors will face similar planning hurdles to coal and gas-fired power plants, opening the door for private enterprise.

The highly controversial move to a low-emission source of electricity has

broadened an election-year divide between the major parties on their plans to tackle climate change.

Labor has ruled out moving to nuclear energy, and is divided over the national conference's expected move this afternoon to scrap the party's "no new mines" policy on uranium.

Mr Howard will order ministers to immediately start work on developing an appropriate nuclear energy regulatory regime, to be finished within months and implemented from 2008.

A government-commissioned nuclear taskforce report last year found the earliest nuclear power could be introduced to Australia was within a decade, but 25 reactors could be built by 2050.

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