



Summary of the meeting held on 20 October 2003 Stamford Sydney Airport

OPENING OF MEETING

All Members attended with the exception of Professor Rob Melchers who had tendered his apologies.

CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 20 JUNE 2003

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed without amendment.

NATIONAL RADIOACTIVE WASTE REPOSITORY (NRWR)

Application for a Siting/Construction/Operating Licence

The CEO advised the Committee that ARPANSA had received an application in August from the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) for a facility licence to authorise the following three activities:

- to prepare Site 40a near Woomera in South Australia for the proposed National Radioactive Waste Repository (NRWR);
- to construct the proposed NRWR; and
- to operate the proposed NRWR

The application had been released for a public comment period ending on 8 November 2003 (http://www.arpansa.gov.au/pub_sub.htm).

A preliminary assessment of the application by ARPANSA indicated that the application required further clarification and possibly supplementation. The CEO had written to DEST to seek clarification and any necessary supplementation.

Members discussed aspects of the application including that:

- DEST might need more internal expertise to manage the consultants and contractors associated with the project;
- it was difficult to find information in the application;
- transport of the waste would be a public issue and would need to be addressed;
- ARPANSA might consider licensing each 'campaign'.

NSC Role in providing advice to the CEO on relevant issues

The CEO advised the Committee that he would be seeking technical advice from both NSC and RHC on issues pertaining to the licence application. The two issues for NSC consideration would be:

- hydrogeological considerations of the site; and
- engineered barriers pertaining to the site.

The terms of reference and timetable for the NSC information were important considerations and any further information from DEST would be needed before the Committee could provide a report. The CEO stated there was enough information in the application for the Committee to start considering the issues.

Following discussion, Members agreed that there was a need for two separate working groups (WGs) and the Chair reminded Members that these were part-time WGs. The role of the WGs would be to prepare individual reports that would be consolidated into a final report for CEO consideration. The report would be expected by February-March 2004

GENERAL BUSINESS

Preliminary proposal from ANSTO for the decommissioning of HIFAR

The Committee was advised of the status of HIFAR with particular reference to its proposed decommissioning. HIFAR had enough fuel to last until 2006 by which time it was expected that the Replacement Research Reactor would be operational. ANSTO had forwarded a draft decommissioning plan for HIFAR to ARPANSA in early 2003 and this had been tabled at the previous NSC meeting. To meet the ARPANSA licensing requirements though, ANSTO would need to forward a formal decommissioning plan to ARPANSA at least one year before the proposed decommissioning date.

The Committee decided to prepare advice to the CEO based on the discussion at this meeting, including records management, training (after 30-years), issues relating to computer based information and ensuring its readability, monitoring other decommissioning projects.

The Committee was also advised that a major shutdown of HIFAR was scheduled for February 2004.

Changes to the molybdenum production method at Lucas Heights

The Committee was updated on issues relating to molybdenum production. The proposed new molybdenum production process would involve the irradiation of low enriched (<20%) uranium pellets in HIFAR for 4-7 days. The separation plant would involve a similar process to the previous process however the gaseous waste would be handled differently. The liquid waste would be solidified on-site and transported as a powder instead of being transported to another site for solidification.

Strategy for off-site iodine distribution – NSW Policy

This briefing was deferred to the next meeting of NSC.

Outcomes from Lucas Heights Inspections

The Committee was updated on recent ARPANSA inspections of ANSTO facilities. These included radiopharmaceuticals (building 54), the medical cyclotron, MOATA, fuel operations, noble gas emissions, HIFAR (maintenance inspection) and the replacement research reactor.

Some particular points raised during the discussion included:

Cyclotron: The facility was well managed. Staff were knowledgeable & responsive on safety and regulatory matters.

MOATA: Transfer to Nuclear Technology was satisfactory and the facility was well kept.

Fuel Operations (Building 23 pond): Staff were knowledgeable and responsive on safety and regulatory matters. Recommendations were made for improvement for fuller reporting of incidents to ARPANSA, eg a cropping pond incident.

The issue of some dead pigeons that had been found had been investigated. ARPANSA was satisfied that the birds had died of natural causes. Any slight contamination of the pigeons had been caused by the water in the pond.

HIFAR: In relation to major projects for HIFAR:

- no modifications were to be carried out unless essential;
- a major shutdown was scheduled for February 2004;
- change to low enriched uranium (LEU) fuel; and
- a change to the molybdenum targets.

A major future ARPANSA focus would be potential competition with RRR for resources.

Members asked about a reference to a possible abnormal occurrence in the quarterly report. The incident occurred when wires in a fuel-handling flask had become jammed. ARPANSA was satisfied that ANSTO had reviewed the matter.

There was also a query regarding reports of groundwater infiltration into the lower levels of the RRR building resulting from rain in the open building and some cracks in the concrete. The cracks had been repaired and a civil engineer from the NSW Public Works and Services, who specialised in concrete dams, investigated the repair method for ARPANSA. He was satisfied with the concrete structures and repair method.

REPORTS

General Report from the CEO

The CEO reported the results of his recent trip overseas including visits to:

- Argonne, Chicago, USA in relation to the use of uranium-molybdenum fuel;
- USDOE for discussions relating to security of sources;
- Yucca Mountain, USA, waste repository;
- a low level radioactive waste repository in Utah;
- a Swedish waste repository;
- the International Conference on Protection of the Environment, Stockholm;
- the General Conference of the IAEA; and
- a meeting relating to the draft Code of Conduct on the Safety of Research Reactors at which he was Chair.

Report on Council – Meeting of 31 July 2003

The Committee was advised that a draft paper on naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORM) issues was being prepared for consideration at the next Council meeting.

Report on RHC – Meeting of 23-24 July 2003

The Committee was advised that the publications program was continuing. Several RISs were being prepared and some new Codes of Practice were expected in the near future.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Committee was updated on the progress of the joint NSC/RHC WG on the pre-disposal management of spent fuel. The WG had met once by teleconference and had established Terms of Reference. Many documents including the Joint Convention, ARPANSA Regulatory Assessment Principles and IAEA Safety Series documents were to be considered in preparing a final report to Council, due in April 2004. A visit to ANSTO on 8 December 2003 was also planned.

CLOSURE AND NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Friday 27 February 2004.