



SUMMARY OF MEETING OF 2 APRIL 2004

OPENING OF MEETING, ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES & CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Council met at ARPANSA's Miranda office on 2 April 2004. Dr Arthur Johnston and Dr Graeme Dickie were apologies, although Dr Dickie joined the meeting by teleconference for one agenda item. Mr Andrew Johnston, Senior Scientist, Radiation Protection Division, SA EPA attended the meeting as an observer. The minutes were confirmed following an editorial amendment.

BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Council reviewed and accepted the draft advice on an indicator of sustainable development for radioactive waste management. The Chair will formally present the final version to the CEO.

The CEO advised that following the completion of the IAEA Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources, he had written to all States and Territories requesting their agreement to give a political commitment to support the Code of Conduct. Subsequently, the Parliamentary Secretary had written to The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, who has now written to the IAEA indicating Australia's commitment to the Code. Council requested that this item be kept on the agenda for the next few meetings.

NORM DISCUSSION PAPER

Council discussed the draft discussion paper and made suggestions to assist in finalising the draft. The Chair and Secretariat will prepare a further draft over the next 3 weeks and circulate to Council members for sign-off. When finalised, the paper will be forwarded to the CEO for a decision on releasing it for public comment.

NATIONAL DIRECTORY FOR RADIATION PROTECTION

Council was informed of the process to develop the National Directory for Radiation Protection, which had been released for public comment along with a Regulatory Impact Statement. The development of the Directory had been agreed by Health Ministers at their Conference in 1999. The Directory process was managed by the Radiation Health Committee in accordance with the issues resolution document agreed by Ministers. The Directory had three main parts; principles, regulatory elements, and guidance for best practice, and included provision for the national adoption of codes and standards.

Council noted that there had been several levels of consultation during the development of the Directory, and that it was intended to finalise the draft in time for endorsement at the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council meeting (10 June) and Australian Health Ministers' Conference (29 July).

NATIONAL RADIOACTIVE WASTE REPOSITORY LICENCE APPLICATION

The CEO informed Council of recent activities relating to the licence application from DEST for the National Radioactive Waste Repository, including the IAEA Peer Review,

the public forum and the preparation of Committee advice. The IAEA draft report has been received and the final report is expected soon. The CEO tabled copies of letters sent to DEST recently. In particular, and without limiting their response, he had informed DEST of issues he would expect them to cover in responding to the IAEA Peer Review, and of the need to demonstrate that there is no detrimental radiological impact on non-human biota by undertaking a screening assessment. A public forum had been held in Adelaide in February, with a panel including Em Prof Lowe. The Panellists' reports on the forum were tabled and Em Prof Lowe discussed his report. Council requested to be kept informed of developments with the Repository.

PUBLICATION OF CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PORTABLE DENSITY/MOISTURE GAUGES

Council was advised of the process for developing the Code of Practice and Safety Guide for Portable Density/Moisture Gauges containing Radioactive Sources, which had included preparation of a regulatory impact statement and a public consultation process, and approval of the draft by RHC at its March 2004 meeting. Council considered the information provided and agreed to recommend to the CEO that the Code be published.

MOBILE PHONES AND CHILDREN – UPDATE ON CURRENT KNOWLEDGE

Dr Colin Roy, Director of ARPANSA's Non-ionizing Radiation Branch, joined the meeting by videoconference to brief Council on the current state of information on the risks to children from exposure to radiofrequency fields from mobile phones. This issue had primarily arisen with publication of the Stewart Report in the UK in 2000, and had been investigated in various others studies.

The Health Council of the Netherlands has also published a report which considered whether there was a need for application of the precautionary principle to set the exposure limits at lower values on account of suspicion of "non-thermal effects", and concluded that there was not.

Dr Roy concluded by saying that there was no clear evidence of increased risk to children, and that the public was best reassured by having an open approach, putting the risks in perspective and providing the best information that we can. ARPANSA would continue to review new papers on this issue, and Dr Roy was requested to keep Council informed of any developments.

CURRENT ISSUES IN MEDICAL RADIATION EXPOSURE

Dr Dickie joined the meeting by teleconference for this item. Recent media attention had been driven by studies published on aspects of medical exposure, particularly CT exposure. Doses in paediatric CT in particular had been drawn to attention. Council noted that the development of the ARPANSA Code of Practice for Radiation Protection in Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology was a further important development that should be widely publicised when it became available.

Council concluded that:

- it should maintain a watching brief on this issue;
- in relation to the further work proposed by ARPANSA's Medical Radiations Branch, the CT survey proposed should pay adequate attention to paediatric CT, and consider issues such as effects on cognitive function as well as cancer;

- ARPANSA should write to Heads of Health Administrations to draw their attention to the need for optimisation of doses for paediatric CT in general hospitals, particularly in regional areas.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASPECTS OF RADIATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT (COMARE)

Council discussed the COMARE Report, which reviewed pregnancy outcomes following preconceptual exposure to radiation. The issue had arisen many years ago when leukaemia clusters near the Sellafield site in the UK were reported. There had been numerous studies since, which had investigated a possible relationship to radiation exposure. The COMARE Report concluded that there was little evidence in epidemiological studies that adverse pregnancy outcomes in general are related to parental exposure to radiation. Council noted the Report.

REPORT FROM THE CEO

The CEO noted that in addition to the National Radioactive Waste Repository application, ARPANSA was still working on various issues related to ANSTO and the Replacement Research Reactor. Requests for approval of systems and components are still proceeding. “Cold” commissioning (ie before fuel is loaded in the reactor) will be dealt with under the construction licence. An application for the operating licence is expected from ANSTO in the latter part of this year. “Hot” commissioning will be considered under this licence application. The HIFAR 4-yearly shutdown is just about to be completed. The new CEO of ANSTO has been appointed, but does not commence until the end of May. Investigation is continuing of an emission of Xenon during radiopharmaceutical production, which exceeded notification levels but is not a health concern. A further incident involved a worker inspecting a valve in the heavy water plant. The worker was splashed with tritiated water as he opened the valve. He was not wearing protective clothing at the time and received an estimated dose of 2-3 mSv.

The CEO had participated in the development of an IAEA Action Plan on protection of the environment, which may lead to changes in the limits. The IAEA Code of Conduct on the Safety of Research Reactors had also been approved by the IAEA Board of Governors.

Council was also informed that ICRP was to release its new draft recommendations at the IRPA Congress in May 2004, and they would be available via the ICRP web site in June 2004.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Report from the Radiation Health Committee

A summary of the RHC meeting of 17-18 March 2004 was tabled, along with a copy of the RHC statement on solaria, which was agreed at the meeting. RHC had been careful not to endorse the use of solaria, but wanted to improve the level of compliance with the Australian Standard.

RHC was preparing advice to the CEO on transport and waste acceptance criteria related to the National Radioactive Waste Repository. Advice on pre-disposal management of spent fuel and waste definitions and classification are also in preparation. A technical report covering the risks associated with radioiodine exposure and the use of iodine prophylaxis prepared by ARPANSA will be released when the revised version of the Intervention Recommendations is released for public comment. A NSW cost-benefit analysis of the UV

Standard, while criticised on the grounds of its completeness, had highlighted issues to resolve in the Standard that would be dealt with in the coming months. RHC had also discussed the process to complete the National Directory for Radiation Protection.

Report from the Nuclear Safety Committee

A summary of the NSC meeting of 5 March 2004 was tabled. The main issues discussed were the preparation of advice to the CEO on engineered barriers and hydrogeology, related to the National Radioactive Waste Repository. NSC also had a presentation by NSW Health regarding their policy on iodine prophylaxis. Their plan was that in the event of a reactor accident at ANSTO, they would evacuate to 3km and administer stable iodine to children based on the WHO 10 mGy averted dose.

OTHER BUSINESS

Council noted the lack of progress in finalising the interventional cardiology questionnaire and requested that the Secretariat contact the Cardiac Society and aim to have the pilot survey of the questionnaire undertaken before the next meeting.

Media releases from the Office of the Supervising Scientist concerning an incident at the ERA Ranger uranium mine in NT were tabled. The incident involved the mine being closed after concerns for worker safety following the discovery that drinking water had been contaminated by process water used in the mine's operation. The media releases stated that there had been no effect on the radioactivity levels in the environment, and detailed the safety measures proposed before workers could return to the site. Council noted the information provided.

CLOSURE AND NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 6 August 2004 at ARPANSA's Yallambie office.