

Radiation Health & Safety Advisory Council

an advisory body to the CEO of ARPANSA, established under the ARPANS Act 1998
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SUMMARY OF MEETING OF 3 AUGUST 2001

1-3. OPENING OF MEETING, ATTENDANCE & APOLOGIES, MINUTES

Council met at ARPANSA's Miranda Office on 3 August 2001. All members were present except for Dr Dickie, Ms Plues and Ms Kidziak. The Chair advised that Mrs Fitch had recently been appointed to a temporary position (for 6 months) with the IAEA in Vienna and had been granted Leave of Absence from the Council until the end of 2001. The minutes were confirmed after some minor editorial corrections.

4. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

4.1. Council Precautionary Principle Working Group

A copy of the latest version of the Precautionary Principle paper was tabled. The Council requested that a two-page advice paper be prepared within the next two months, for circulation prior to the next meeting.

4.2. Council & the Public

As indicated in the reply by the Chair to a letter from Sutherland Shire Council concerning the openness of RHSAC meetings, Council had placed its agenda on the ARPANSA web site more than a week in advance of the meeting, along with an invitation to make submissions. ARPANSA's Public Affairs Officer had circulated this information to many interest groups. A post-Council briefing had also been advised on the web site and would be held if any interested persons arrived.

The CEO also advised of the Engadine public meeting on the research reactor construction licence application, where a new meeting format had been used. There were three booths and people were able to wander, pick up information and ask questions individually. A combined question and answer session had been held and the format was considered to have worked well. The next such meeting would include the authorisations issued to ANSTO.

5. COUNCIL RADIOACTIVE WASTE WORKING GROUP

The CEO had written formally asking the Council to advise on radioactive waste issues. A working group had been formed and their work will now be collated into a single paper for consideration at the next Council meeting. The Chair also noted that the CEO had foreshadowed that he will seek advice on disposal of intermediate level waste at a later time.

6. INTERVENTIONAL CARDIOLOGY

A joint letter from Council and the Cardiac Society of Australia will be sent to all Cardiology Units. The letter referred to in the potential for radiation injuries during interventional cardiology procedures and their avoidance. It was important to find out about current practice in Australia, and to provide information from ICRP 85 on avoidance of injuries. It was intended that a questionnaire would be developed later to obtain baseline data on equipment, personnel and procedures. The questionnaire would be piloted at a small number of centres, and later sent to all cardiology centres in Australia.

7. RADIOFREQUENCY STANDARD - PROGRESS REPORT AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

The CEO informed Council of the current progress towards a Standard on Radiofrequency Fields, and issues that had arisen in working group discussions. The draft Standard had been released for public comment in March for a period of two months. Over 60 submissions had been received. The working group had met in July and was still considering the comment received. The working group was due to meet again on 15-16 August to complete consideration of the public comment. It was then likely that there would be a meeting in September to finalise the draft.

8. A POSSIBLE NATIONAL SURVEY OF ELF

The CEO discussed a paper considering a national survey of ELF levels in homes. The possibility had arisen following release of the UK Advisory Group on Non-Ionizing Radiation (AGNIR), which had said that despite the absence of animal and laboratory evidence, there is epidemiological evidence of an association between ELF and childhood leukaemia where long term average exposure was greater than 0.4 μ T. In the UK only 0.5% of homes exceeded this level. A survey could provide a comparison with levels in Australian homes.

ARPANSA's NIR Branch had designed and costed a study to examine the levels in Australian homes. The CEO requested Council advice on whether a survey at the costs indicated was worth doing. Council decided that a small group consisting of Mr Raue, Dr de Klerk and Dr Robb would provide feedback on the issues that need to be considered.

It was also considered that a small pilot survey could establish issues to be resolved before a larger survey was undertaken. A segment of the pilot could assess exposure by calculation to determine whether calculated exposure can be correlated with measured exposure.

It was noted that WHO is to review non-cancer health effects of ELF in 2002.

9. NEW TRANSPORT CODE - APPROVAL OF FINAL CODE

Mr Melbourne reported on the process undertaken to develop the new Transport Code, which had now been approved by Radiation Health Committee. Australia controls transport of radioactive materials by adopting the IAEA transport regulations within an Australian code of practice, which clarifies and modifies the IAEA regulations for Australian circumstances. The most recent IAEA regulations were now being adopted worldwide, so that there was a need for Australia to update its code.

The process to develop the code included formation of a working group, consideration and comment on drafts by the Radiation Health Committee, development of a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) to meet the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) requirements, a period of public consultation, review by the working group of the 23 submissions received and finally Radiation Health Committee consideration of the final draft and the approach taken by the working group to the comment received.

Council agreed to advise the CEO to adopt the Transport Code, and noted Ms Plues objection that the RIS had not been quantitative.

10. REPORT FROM THE CEO

The CEO advised that he had issued a licence for the HIFAR reactor and had published a safety evaluation report, a statement of reasons and the licence and conditions. Licences for fuel management and radiopharmaceutical production had also been issued, along with an airborne discharge authorisation. The discharge authorisation applied until the start of 2002, and in the mean time there will be a public consultation process on that issue.

The construction licence application and Preliminary Safety Assessment Report (PSAR) for the replacement research reactor had been received in May. Summaries are available on ARPANSA's web site, on CD and in print. The first round of public submissions was due to be completed by 5 September 2001. A Peer Review had now been completed and published.

A public forum had been proposed for September. This was to be a two-day event where people could make submissions and be subject to questioning. ANSTO, INVAP and ISR (in relation to waste issues) had agreed to be involved. However, the Sutherland Shire Council and environmental groups had advised that they did not want to be involved unless its form were that of a judicial process, so the forum will not proceed.

A program of testing for strontium-90 in bone samples had been undertaken in Australia from 1957 until 1978. ARPANSA had inherited the records of this program. The program had been to assess the effects of fallout from nuclear weapons testing. ARPANSA was creating a database of the records, and preparing a report for the Minister.

The CEO had also attended an International Advisory Committee meeting in Geneva for the WHO EMF project and a meeting considering the need for international action on research reactors.

11. COMMITTEE REPORTS

11.1. Report from Radiation Health Committee

The report of the Radiation Health Committee meeting on 18-19 July 2001 was tabled. It included reports on the RF Standard and Transport Code, but also consideration of radioactive waste issues and the development of a code on pre-disposal management. Advice on disposal of smoke detectors was also being prepared. Reports on the Mining Code and Safety Guide covering radiation protection and waste management issues were also provided.

11.2. Report from Nuclear Safety Committee

The report of the Nuclear Safety Committee meeting of 5-6 July 2001 was tabled. The report outlined the Committee's workplan to consider the major issues identified for advice to the CEO

(seismic design, accident analysis, and spent fuel and waste management). Working groups had been formed on each issue, and a timetable for their work established.

12. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Raue queried whether any decisions had been made regarding establishing a database for reporting of RF exposure effects as recommended by the Senate Inquiry. The CEO responded that ARPANSA had formed a working group, which met recently to develop the framework for a database, and how it would operate.

Mr Raue also advised that he had received a letter from a Maralinga veteran, Mr Alan Batchelor. It was agreed that Mr Raue should discuss the letter with relevant ARPANSA staff to assist in replying to the letter.

13. CLOSURE AND NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is proposed to be held on 30 November 2001 at ARPANSA's Yallambie Office.