



SUMMARY OF MEETING OF 3 AUGUST 2007

OPENING OF MEETING, ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES AND CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Council met at the Sofitel Hotel, Brisbane on 3 August 2007. All members were present except Mr Ian Sawyer. The Chair noted that Council was meeting in Brisbane for the first time to assist in a process of interaction with the States and Territories. Council also thanked Mr Critchley and staff of the Royal Brisbane and Womens Hospital for arranging the tour of nuclear medicine and security facilities at the hospital, attended by Council members on 2 August 2007. The minutes were confirmed without amendment.

BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Council was informed of developments internationally since last meeting. ICRP had finalised its recommendations in March. It was expected that the recommendations would be published later this year. Council was informed of IAEA progress in revising the Basic Safety Standard (BSS 115) following a Technical Meeting in Vienna in July. Drafts of 7 chapters had been prepared by separate working groups, but were not consistent in style or the level of detail yet. The new BSS will also need to be consistent with the 2007 ICRP recommendations and IAEA's Fundamental Safety Principles (SF-1). Council will be kept informed of progress.

ASSESSMENT OF SAFETY OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The Chair introduced this item by summarising recent developments in the nuclear debate in Australia. The CEO discussed his draft letter to Council, requesting their advice on the assessment of safety of nuclear power plants. He advised that it was important that Council not advocate for the use of nuclear power, but that Council could use its expertise and experience to provide a high level overview of the global situation in regard to safety and maximising safety. There is also public concern about the safety of nuclear power plants, including whether there is the possibility of serious accidents. Council noted that the request was to produce a letter of about 6 pages, containing high level advice and discussion on assessment of the safety of nuclear power plants.

Council discussed the circulated documents, the INSAG 21 Report, the INSAG letters of 2005 and 2006 to the IAEA Director General, and the Summary Report of the Third Review Meeting of the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS).

Council discussed the task in the context of the circulated documents, and sought further clarification from the CEO on the advice requested. Council noted that the CEO did not expect the task to include other aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle, such as enrichment, and wanted a document that concentrated on Australia's interests but taking account of the international context. Council considered that this was a worthwhile project and agreed to undertake it aiming for a final draft at the December 2007 Council meeting.

Dr Harbison, former Chief Nuclear Inspector in the UK, and current member of INSAG, joined the meeting by teleconference.

Dr Harbison briefly described INSAG's work and the CNS. He advised that the CNS involved countries in peer review meetings and discussion of issues identified. A draft letter

outlining a response to the CEO will be prepared and circulated. A teleconference will then be held in the first half of September, with Dr Harbison participating. Detailed drafting of the letter responding to the CEO will take place after the teleconference.

ASSESSMENT OF THE SAFETY OF SPENT FUEL AND RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT

The CEO advised Council that this report had been tabled as background for the proposed Council review to assess the safety of spent fuel and radioactive waste management. He also informed Council of processes being undertaken in the UK in considering radioactive waste issues. The UK had convened a committee of people with a variety of expertise and backgrounds to review all options, and had undertaken an innovative process of consultation, leading to a recommendation carefully staged process to develop a deep geological repository. The CEO noted that retrievability of the material, even in deep geological repositories was now an important consideration. The UK government intended to proceed with the recommendations of the report. In Canada, an industry body supported by an Act of Parliament had also undertaken an extensive consultation process leading to recommendations for 'phased adaptive management' of waste that the Government had accepted. Council was informed that the Joint Convention was relatively new and the processes and reporting were still developing.

ANSTO APPLICATION TO POSSESS AND CONTROL HIFAR

The CEO informed Council that HIFAR had been shut down in January 2007. A closure phase after the shutdown is controlled initially under the operating licence. However the proposal requires various maintenance activities to be undertaken until decommissioning is carried out after 10 years. In that time there should be a Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Facility. The EPBC Act defines decommissioning as a 'nuclear action' and it would therefore require an Environmental Impact Statement to be completed before decommissioning could commence. The ARPANS Act allows for a licence to possess and control and ANSTO applied for this licence at the end of May. The application is on the ARPANSA web site and had been available for a period of comment ending on 3 August 2007. Little comment had been received at present. ARPANSA was preparing a series of questions for ANSTO. These and the answers would be made public. There was also likely to be a public event in Sutherland Shire. Council noted that the Nuclear Safety Committee had discussed the ANSTO application at its last meeting.

The CEO also advised Council of an ANSTO media release on the shutdown of the OPAL reactor for 8 weeks. There were two issues involved. The first was leakage of water causing dilution of the heavy water. This was not a safety issue but would degrade the performance of the reactor. In addition, a number of fuel plates had risen out of the fuel assembly by about 40cm. The integrity was still intact as there was no leakage, however there was potential for a problem. This appears to be a manufacturing fault, and will require review to ensure that future fuel is satisfactory. There had been international notification of the event. An accident analysis of the possibilities was also required.

REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NATIONAL DIRECTORY FOR RADIATION PROTECTION, EDITION 1

The Chair reminded Council that last meeting it had agreed to undertake this review at the Radiation Health Committee's request. A questionnaire had been prepared to seek information from all jurisdictions along with letters to the heads of department, and a draft

reply to the Radiation Health Committee. Council was advised that it was proposed to have a consultant assist with the collection of information and preparation of the report, and that the questionnaires were expected to be completed face-to-face with jurisdictional officers. Council discussed the approach and raised a number of points for consideration. It was agreed that the questionnaire would be reviewed and a further version circulated. The letters were agreed as being ready to send. Members were requested to send any further suggestions for the questionnaire.

BRIEFING ON THE INTEGRATED REGULATORY REVIEW SERVICE MISSION TO ARPANSA

Senator The Hon Brett Mason, Parliamentary Secretary for Health, joined the meeting during this item. The Chair introduced members and described recent Council and ARPANSA activities. Senator Mason noted that nuclear issues were much more on the political horizon, the important work done by Council, and the information on the Council's web site.

Council was advised that the Integrated Regulatory Review Service (IRRS) Mission to review ARPANSA's regulatory system had occurred in June/July 2007. The Leader was Kaare Ulbek of Denmark. The review looked at a wide range of regulatory activities including the structure of the regulations, what is regulated, implementation, regulatory management systems, regulatory policy and licensing. Stakeholder involvement, the approach to regulation, and skills and training were also reviewed. A preparatory meeting was held in February, and a self-assessment completed before the mission. The review itself is based upon the IAEA Safety Standards and benchmarking against these. The review report has a standard format that identifies areas that must be improved, suggestions that would lead to improvement, and good practices that others could learn from. The review also considered uniformity and the team was impressed with the progress of harmonization via the National Directory for Radiation Protection. Progress with the regulatory management system was also recognised. A draft report was provided to ARPANSA at the exit meeting, and a final report to the Australian Government will be provided by the end of August. It is expected that the final report will be made available via the ARPANSA web site. An action plan will be developed to address the recommendations, and a follow up mission may occur in 2-3 years at a negotiated time, to check on progress in dealing with the recommendations.

CURRENT ISSUES AND DIRECTIONS IN RADIATION PROTECTION IN QUEENSLAND

Mr Paul Carroll, Senior Director Radiology Support, Clinical and Statewide Division, Queensland Health, joined the meeting to give a presentation on the radiology reform project being undertaken in Queensland. He indicated that there were 1.3 million examinations per year in Queensland at 140 facilities with 40 radiologists, 500 diagnostic radiographers, and 400 X-ray operators. Demand for radiology services was also increasing, with demand in some areas for some services rising by 14% in a year. A Statewide Steering Committee had been established for the reform project. Issues included access to services, access to clinicians, reporting by radiologists, and reviewing CT doses. Four steps were recommended to resolve the issues:

Step 1: Go digital – 70 sites will need to replace film processing by mid 2008 making Queensland the first State to go fully digital.

Step 2: Build an imaging network – including computed radiography and reporting hubs

Step 3: Develop a Medical Imaging Transfer System

Step 4: Develop integrated viewing capacity including both public and private sector and enabling transfer to GPs.

The Chair thanked Mr Carroll for his presentation and discussion with Council.

REPORT FROM THE CEO

The CEO advised Council that the Minister for Defence had issued a media release on tighter measures for managing tritium, following a review of the issue by a committee led by Defence and including ARPANSA staff. As a result Defence have appointed Major General Grant Cavanagh, Commander Joint Logistics, to supervise implementation of the review recommendations and to be responsible for the management of sources in Defence. ARPANSA will oversee Defence's implementation of the report's findings.

The media release by the Prime Minister on 28 April had included provision for an expanded nuclear industry. This would involve addressing skills needs, enhanced research and development, an appropriate nuclear energy regulatory regime, and communication strategies. The strategy includes removing constraints impeding the expansion of the industry, including in the ARPANS Act, and participation in the Generation IV advanced nuclear reactor research programme.

A National Dose Register for uranium workers was also proposed. A paper had been prepared, however funding was still to be considered.

Announcements on the expanded nuclear industry were expected in September. The National Dose Register may also be included in these announcements.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Report from the Radiation Health Committee (RHC)

Council noted that the full decisions of RHC on the medical radiation code and the ELF Standard, along with a Statement on the Application of the Occupational Exposure Limits for First Responders in Emergencies involving Radiation had been released on the web site. Council was advised that the medical radiation code had been released for a period of industry comment and a revised code discussed at the Committee meeting. It was now intended to release the code and safety guides for public comment with an RIS on 21 August until late October. The National Conference would be held during the consultation period. The RIS was currently in preparation by a consultant, and would require clearance from the Office of Best Practice Regulation before being released.

Report from the Nuclear Safety Committee

Council was informed that the Nuclear Safety Committee had substantive discussion on HIFAR. The Committee also had discussion on the disposal of radioactive waste not suitable for near-surface disposal.

OTHER BUSINESS

Members were requested to provide comment on the draft Annual Report.

CLOSURE AND NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 7 December 2007.