

RADIATION HEALTH & SAFETY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of the meeting held on 14 April 2000

1. & 2. OPENING OF MEETING, ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

Dr McLean opened the meeting at 9:35 am. All members except Dr Dickie attended:
Dr Smith left the meeting and was absent for items 5.4, 6, 7.1-7.5, 7.7
Dr McLean left the meeting and was absent for items 6, 7.3-7.5, 7.7 (Mrs Fitch Chaired the meeting for those items).

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES - MEETING OF 10 DECEMBER 1999

The draft minutes were confirmed without amendment. It was noted that the summary of the meeting of 10 December had now been placed on the ARPANSA Web site.

4. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The CEO advised that a draft document providing guidance on networking for the local government representative on the Nuclear Safety Committee (NSC) had been provided to Dr Smith for comment.

The CEO also reported that flowing from the Kaldor report, the role of ARPANSA and the Council as 'honest broker' for veterans concerned about the impact of radiation on health had been accepted.

Council also requested that it be kept informed of progress of the Senate Inquiry on Electromagnetic Radiation.

4.1 Availability of Council minutes/documents

It was agreed that a summary of outcomes of meetings would be prepared for the Web site. This summary would be finalised out of session after circulation to all members and placed on the Web site as soon as possible after agreement. Full minutes would be available on request, either electronically or in paper form, but only after the final version was confirmed at the following meeting.

4.2 MOU with Standards Australia

The CEO reported that a meeting had been held with Standards Australia to commence development of an agreement. The CEO advised that a similar approach will be taken the National Occupational Health & Safety Commission (NOHSC).

5. RADIOACTIVE WASTE ISSUES

5.1 Briefing on National Radioactive Waste Repository

Mr Jeff Harris, General Manager, Minerals Access and Rehabilitation, Department of Industry, Science and Resources, addressed the Council on the proposed National Radioactive Waste Repository. His presentation covered the amount of radioactive waste and expected arisings in Australia, the process for site selection for the National Radioactive Waste Repository, including the consultation process, and the current progress towards site selection. Mr Harris also touched on proposals for a store for long-lived material.

5.2 Report on Radioactive Waste Management Conference

The CEO reported on an international conference he had attended in Cordoba, Spain on radioactive waste management. The conference had focussed largely on high-level waste issues, although low-level waste management, mining waste and contaminated sites were also discussed. The conference also included a visit to the Spanish waste repository at El Cabril.

5.2 Briefing on Maralinga

Mr Peter Burns, Director of ARPANSA's Environmental and Radiation Health Branch, provided Council with a historical overview and status report on the Maralinga Rehabilitation Project. He covered the historical aspects of the tests undertaken at Maralinga, the clean-up processes used, and the current status of work. ARPANSA's principal role in the clean-up was to ensure that the contamination had been removed to the levels specified.

5.3 Possible Council action on waste issues

Council was advised that one of the conditions arising from the Environmental Impact Assessment for the replacement reactor was a need to consider long-term management/disposal options for spent fuel from the reactor. It may be that the Council could play a role in the examination of the issues.

Council also noted the importance of having an appropriate waste disposal system. It was agreed that Council should develop a statement on radioactive waste management in Australia.

6. BRIEFING AND INSPECTION – ARPANSA'S ROLE IN MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN TREATY (CTBT)

Dr Malcolm Cooper of ARPANSA's Environmental & Radiation Health Branch briefed the Council on arrangements for the CTBT. He provided background on the treaty and the monitoring arrangements. There will be 310 monitoring stations worldwide, including 80 radionuclide stations. At this stage, ARPANSA may operate up to 7 radionuclide stations. Council members inspected the ARPANSA monitoring station following closure of the meeting.

7. REPORTS

7.1 ARPANSA's Activities

The CEO reported on recent ARPANSA activities; in particular, the licensing of current ANSTO facilities. ANSTO has applied for licences for HIFAR, Australian Radioisotopes, and for waste management. The Act requires that the CEO provide public notification of the applications and to call for public submissions in response. In doing so information provided as part of the application must also be made public. A sub-group of the Nuclear Safety Committee is to discuss this matter.

7.2 Report from Radiation Health Committee

Mrs Fitch reported that, at its meeting on 21-22 March 2000, RHC agreed that a Radiation Regulators' Forum was still needed to discuss implementation and jurisdictional issues. Reports from other meetings and conferences had been discussed, including the People's Conference on the Waste Repository. Reports from working groups on mining codes, and scoping of radioactive waste issues were discussed. Establishment of working groups on medical radiation issues and scope of regulation were agreed. The template for Radiation Protection Series publications was agreed.

RHC reviewed various issues related to the publication program, including regulation impact requirements, agreed to the name "Radiation Protection Standards" to distinguish from Australian Standards. Various draft codes were discussed and will be updated to the template form for next meeting. It was noted that it was important that the Transport Code be adopted by 1 January 2001.

7.3 Report from Nuclear Safety Committee

Ms Kidziak reported that the Nuclear Safety Committee had met on 3 April 2000 and considered a wide range of issues. Dr Lee (member of NSC) had presented on the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) approach to systemic investigations. Dr Caroline Perkins of the Department of Industry Science and Resources also addressed the NSC on the proposed National Radioactive Waste Repository.

Aspects of ARPANSA's licensing process were considered, including public participation, which was to be discussed further by a sub-group of NSC. The licensing process for the replacement reactor and the expected timelines for review of applications were discussed, along with the safety case for HIFAR, ARPANSA's assessment of ANSTO's advice on their criticality safety arrangements, and a report from the working group reviewing the ARPANSA Safety Assessment Principles for Controlled Facilities (SAP). A working group was established, with the aim of reviewing the Criteria for the Design of Nuclear Installations by the end of the year.

7.4 Draft Working Group procedures

Council reviewed the draft working group procedures. The main issues revolved around working group discussions and documents. Council suggested some amendments to make its intent clearer. The procedures will be circulated out of session and finalised by the end of May.

7.5 Radiological Accident in Thailand

Mr Burns (ARPANSA) briefed Council of the radiological accident in Thailand wherein a disused therapy source was taken from the car park of a company that distributed radiotherapy machines. Council noted that the lack of an appropriate disposal mechanism was a factor in this accident.

7.6 Report on RF Exposure Standard Working Group

A report from Dr Dickie, Council's observer on the working group, was tabled along with a copy of the meeting record. Dr Roy outlined the progress made. Council discussed the relationship of the Standard with codes of practice developed by the Australian Communication Industry Forum (ACIF) and the Australian Communication Authority (ACA) approach to voluntary and mandatory codes. The working group's intention at this time is to have a draft ready for public comment during the third quarter of the year.

Dr Roy also gave a summary of the National Health & Medical Research Council funded research on electromagnetic fields.

Dr Roy provided Council with comment on the issue of whether use of 'hands-free' devices increased exposure to RF from mobile phones, and also on the expected timing of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) assessment of whether EMF is a carcinogen.

7.7 Report on Incident Register Development & Medical Radiation Issues

Dr Smart reported on progress in re-developing the Australian Radiation Incidents Register. A discussion paper is to be prepared for the next Radiation Health Committee meeting.

A new material, Quadramet (containing Sm-153) had a potential problem with disposal, which had highlighted the lack of uniformity of exemption limits between the States and Territories and the Commonwealth. Dr Smart will present a paper on incidents in nuclear medicine at the next Council meeting.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Council discussed aspects of newspaper articles that had referred to the Chair of Council.

9. CLOSURE AND NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for the week commencing Monday 24 July.

The meeting closed at 4:35 pm.