



17 April 2024

Dr Gillian Hirth  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency  
619 Lower Plenty Road  
YALLAMBIE  
VICTORIA 3085

Dear Dr Hirth,

### **Australian national preparedness and response capability for radiological emergencies**

The Radiation Health and Safety Advisory Council (**Council**), as a statutory advisory body to the CEO of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (**ARPANSA**), has considered the requirements for Australian national preparedness and response for radiological emergencies in relation to imminent changes to the risk environment. The adoption of nuclear-powered submarines by Australia will add novel, more complex potential hazards which may not be adequately managed with current capabilities or present arrangements.

Council's considerations are detailed in the attached ***Background paper - Australian National Preparedness and Response Capability for Radiological Emergencies***.

Council has considered the necessity for a critical review of the adequacy of Australian national emergency preparedness and response capability for radiological emergencies. Council believes that nuclear-powered submarines provide an imperative for such a review, and has therefore made immediate recommendations which it believes are needed to develop the robust capability expected by Australians.

Council acknowledges that ARPANSA is not solely responsible for national preparedness and response for radiological emergencies. However, Council considers that ARPANSA is uniquely placed as the Commonwealth Government's competent authority to:

- provide advice to government on the identified gaps and potential solutions
- promote national coordination and integration of capability
- provide leadership and strategic guidance to enhance preparedness and response for radiological emergencies.

Council presents the following recommendations for your consideration:

1. that a strategic review of Australia's preparedness and response capabilities for radiological emergencies should be undertaken as soon as possible;
2. that a coordinated national strategy for radiological emergency training and workforce development be established as soon as possible, with a strategic focus on the initial locations of nuclear-powered submarine capability;
3. that the review of the Australian clinical guidance for radiological emergencies 2012 commence urgently, as the existing guidance is over a decade old, which would generally be considered obsolete by health professionals;
4. that enhancement of radiological emergency workforce capability and capacity commence as soon as possible, including for the health sector;
5. that ARPANSA advocates for funding and resources for all national participants to address the identified shortfalls in preparedness and response for radiological emergencies.

Further, Council recommends that ARPANSA should:

6. actively engage with the Australian Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with respect to enhancing Australian capacity and capability for radiological emergencies;
7. maintain its existing emergency capabilities as a minimum, consistent with its mission to protect the Australian people and environment from the harmful effects of radiation, in view of the current critical deficiencies in national capacity and capability.

Council looks forward to your response and advice as to how Council could assist ARPANSA in this important matter.

Yours sincerely



**Jane Canestra**  
**Chair**  
Radiation Health and Safety Advisory Council