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Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation

Media Release

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Nuclear reactor fuel submission remains under consideration by safety regulator

ANSTO¹ today advised that the safety regulator (ARPANSA²) has requested further information on and clarification of ANSTO's application to modify the reactor fuel design and to restart operation of the reactor.

The OPAL reactor has been shut down for seven months following the partial displacement of some fuel plates. Investigations of the cause of the displacement indicated that they were caused by a problem in the fuel manufacture, and consequently changes to the design of the fuel have been proposed to avoid any future failures.

ANSTO lodged its application with ARPANSA on 21 December 2007. ARPANSA advised ANSTO on 1 February 2008 that questions and requests for clarification would be sent to ANSTO as part of the review process.

Late last week, ARPANSA submitted a series of questions on the application, which ANSTO will respond to as quickly as possible. This is expected to take some weeks.

The reactor cannot recommence operation with the modified fuel until regulatory approval is granted by the CEO of ARPANSA.

If approval for restart is given, operation of OPAL can recommence immediately using a 'start-up' core specially manufactured to the new design.

ANSTO places a high priority on nuclear safety, which has necessitated time-consuming but thorough examination, analysis and testing. ANSTO recognises that ARPANSA must also carry out its own thorough review.

The public can be reassured that there are no abnormal safety or radiation issues. The reactor design is sound, and it operated successfully for a year prior to the shutdown.

ANSTO has continued to keep the community and customers regularly updated on progress during the shutdown.

For more information please contact ANSTO Media Relations Manager, Sharon Kelly, on (02) 9717 9575 or 0400 394 085

¹ Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation

² Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency