



Media Release

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OPAL Reactor Restarts

Today, low power testing with a full reactor core of 16 fuel elements, commenced at the OPAL nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights operated by ANSTO*. This is the first vital step in bringing the reactor back to full operation after being shut down since last July following the partial displacement of some fuel plates.

Prior to the shutdown, OPAL had successfully operated for a year during its commissioning process. After the shutdown, investigations indicated the problem was caused by a combination of factors, including inadequate design and fuel manufacturing techniques. Consequently, changes to the fuel design to avoid future plate movements were made. These were approved by the independent nuclear safety regulator, ARPANSA** on 1 May.

ANSTO's Chief Executive Officer, Dr Ian Smith said he was delighted that this first step back to full power had been successful.

"This is the first stage in getting the reactor fully functional again, although it's a slow process. It's not just a case of flicking a switch.

"A special start-up core which consists of new fuel assemblies manufactured to the modified design and a neutron-emitting source was needed to restart the reactor. Now the power will be gradually increased," he said.

ANSTO will conduct a series of tests to ensure everything is functioning properly with the new fuel and all the reactor systems before slowly taking OPAL to full power.

It has taken a number of months to reach this stage. This was because modifications to the fuel had to be designed and approved. Following an investigation process which began last July, ANSTO lodged an application to modify the fuel design with the nuclear safety regulator ARPANSA in December. During the assessment period since then ANSTO responded to requests for further information.

There have not been any abnormal safety or radiation issues. ANSTO has kept the community and customers regularly updated on progress during the shutdown, and will continue to do so during the re-start period.

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

* Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation

** Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency