



Media Release

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Safety regulator continues assessment of nuclear reactor fuel submission

ANSTO¹ today advised that further information has been provided to the nuclear safety regulator (ARPANSA²) on ANSTO's application to modify the reactor fuel design and use fuel conforming to that design when operating the reactor.

ANSTO has this week completed providing responses to 95 questions or requests for information on the application. The answers were provided in three separate packages progressively over a period of two weeks. The last of the packages was provided to ARPANSA on Monday 31 March. Such requests for further information are a normal part of the ongoing assessment of the application

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

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

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, and those were provided to ANSTO on 18 February 2008.

The OPAL reactor has been shut down since July last year following the partial displacement of some fuel plates. Investigations of the cause of the displacements indicated that they were caused by a combination of factors including inadequate design and fuel manufacture techniques. Consequently changes to the design of the fuel have been proposed to avoid any future plate movements.

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.

NB: A photograph is also available of ARPANSA CEO John Loy inspecting the proposed design change on a fuel assembly

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