

## **Extension to the Regional Co-operative Agreement for research, development and training related to nuclear science and technology**

### **Background<sup>1</sup>**

- 4.1 The first Regional Co-operative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology (the 1987 RCA) entered into force on 12 June 1987. The 1987 RCA was based on an Agreement of the same name concluded in 1972 (1972 RCA), which was subsequently extended in 1977 and 1982.
- 4.2 The provisions of the 1987 RCA follow closely those of the 1972 RCA. The purpose of the 1987 update was to enhance overall coordination and supervision of co-operative projects carried out under RCA arrangements. The 1987 RCA was extended in 1992 and 1997. The Third Extension continued in force from 12 June 2002.
- 4.3 Australia became a party to the RCA in 1977. The other participants are Japan, New Zealand, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Mongolia and Burma. As at 27 June 2002, thirteen states had accepted the Third Extension Agreement. States, apart from

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1 Unless otherwise specified the material in Chapter has been drawn from the National Interest Analysis (NIA) for the *Third Agreement to extend the 1987 Regional Co-operative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology, done in Vienna, on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of October 2001*, and evidence received at a public hearing held in Canberra on 21 October 2002.

Australia, that had not accepted the Agreement as at 21 October 2002 were New Zealand, Singapore and Thailand.<sup>2</sup>

- 4.4 The Committee understands that the RCA is an important mechanism in fulfilling the technical co-operation provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (the NPT). Continued membership of the 1987 RCA is therefore one way for Australia to meet its obligations to co-operate with other Parties in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy under the NPT.
- 4.5 The Committee was advised that the NPT is the centrepiece of the non-proliferation regime which, for over a quarter of a century, has helped maintain Australia's immediate strategic environment free from nuclear weapons. Under the NPT non-nuclear weapon states have foresworn nuclear weapons and accepted comprehensive safeguards to verify compliance with this commitment. However, they retain the right to research, develop and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.
- 4.6 As a party to the NPT, Australia has made a commitment:  
to facilitate ... the fullest possible exchange of equipment materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.<sup>3</sup>
- 4.7 The 1987 RCA also allows Australia to participate in international collaborative projects and to maintain and extend a national capacity in cutting-edge nuclear technologies. RCA activities are conducted under the auspices of the Technical Co-operation Programme administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- 4.8 The Committee understands that there are no additional (ie further to the existing 1987 Agreement) obligations placed on Australia under the proposed extension, and that information has been provided to the States and Territories through the Commonwealth-State Standing Committee on Treaties' Schedule of Treaty Action.

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2 The Committee was advised by Dr Easey, of the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, that this delay was normal and that he was not aware of these states objecting to the extension of the Agreement.

3 National Interest Analysis, p. 2.

## Evidence presented and issues arising

### International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

4.9 The Committee was advised that the IAEA provides a secretariat to administer the RCA program. The Committee also notes for states to be members of the RCA, they must first be a member of the IAEA.<sup>4</sup>

4.10 Australia has been a designated member of the board of the IAEA since its inception in 1957, and enjoys a high standing within the Agency.<sup>5</sup> The Committee was advised that:

Through the RCA, this ... enhances our status in the Agency and ensures that we continue to be seen as a lead provider of nuclear technology in the region and as one of the leading countries in the region ... in the supply of nuclear materials and technology.<sup>6</sup>

### Development and management of the RCA program

4.11 The RCA program has matured over the years since its inception, from capacity building into:

applications that assist in addressing and providing solutions to environmentally sustainable development programs and challenges of collective importance.<sup>7</sup>

4.12 The Committee understands that the cooperation program covers six broad thematic sectors: health, environment, industry, radiation protection, agriculture and energy. Dr John Easey, from the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), explained the nature of the cooperative activities in reference to the health, environment and radiation protection thematic sectors.

### Australia's contributions to the RCA

4.13 The annual budget of the RCA is approximately \$US4 .5 million, approximately 60 percent of which is provided by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), through its Technical Cooperation Fund. The remainder is sought from donors' provision of extra-budgetary support.

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4 Dr John Easey, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 21.

5 Dr Terry Beven, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 26.

6 Dr Terry Beven, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 26.

7 Dr John Easey, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 17.

- 4.14 The Committee was advised that while Australia and Japan are major extra-budgetary donors, other RCA Member States and the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) have also provided considerable financial and in-kind assistance.<sup>8</sup>
- 4.15 As a party to the RCA, Australia has the option of contributing financially and 'in-kind'. Australia's financial contributions to the RCA are provided through the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). 'In-kind' contributions are given through the placement of RCA fellowship awardees for study in Australia, the provision of courses and experts to provide assistance to the IAEA or to individual RCA Member States on behalf of the IAEA, and the hosting of RCA meetings sponsored by the IAEA. These costs are met by relevant agencies from their existing resources.

### **Australia's involvement in the provision of training under the RCA**

- 4.16 The Committee was interested to learn about the leading role played by Australia in the provision and organisation of medical training programs across the region under the auspices of the RCA. The Committee was advised that Australia is leading half of the projects in the health care sector:
- All three are to do with distance learning and trying to upgrade skills and career paths, particularly for medical technicians ... we have had a project going, it is now in its seventh year, which is training nuclear medicine technicians.<sup>9</sup>
- 4.17 The Committee was advised that Australia plays an important role in designing and assessing these distance-learning training courses. Australian assessors travel periodically to the countries involved, ensuring an interactive learning process. The Committee understands that this program is highly regarded and successful, notwithstanding the delays and challenges involved in translation of relevant materials.
- 4.18 Further distance training programs involve a program for medical graduates (in the field of oncology) and in medical physics. The Committee was advised that there is a critical shortage in the Asia-Pacific region of medical physicists, who are essential to ensure that optimum performance is obtained from equipment that represents considerable investment by the countries involved.
- 4.19 Importantly, such activities are being undertaken outside the nuclear fuel cycle; therefore it is the opinion of the Committee that training nuclear

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8 Dr John Easey, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 18.

9 Dr John Easey, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 21.

technicians for a nuclear power such as China does not present any diplomatic predicaments. The RCA program is very specific in its application to environmentally sustainable development and according to ANSTO, China sees great benefit in using training materials that have been prepared, piloted and credentialed.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusions and recommendation

- 4.20 The Committee was impressed by the quality of evidence presented by Dr Easey and his depth of knowledge and breadth of experience relating to the RCA. The Committee concurs with Dr Easey's view that:

Australia has been playing a lead role in developing management strategies to enable RCA Member States to take on more responsibility for the development and implementation of the program.<sup>11</sup>

- 4.21 The Committee further concurs with Dr Easey's view that:

... the extensive networking that occurs between the counterpart agencies engenders a cooperative atmosphere that assists mutual understanding and facilitates regional contact across a wide range of science and technologies ...<sup>12</sup>

### Recommendation 5

- 4.22 The Committee supports the Third Agreement to Extend the 1987 Regional Co-operative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology and recommends that binding treaty action be taken.**

**Julie Bishop MP**  
**Committee Chair**  
**December 2002**

10 Dr John Easey, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 23.

11 Dr John Easey, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 19.

12 Dr John Easey, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 19.