

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Additional Estimates Hearing
26 February 2009

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Decommissioning of HIFAR Reactor

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Eggleston

QUESTION No.: AI-9

1. Could you provide us with an update on the decommissioning process of HIFAR?
2. What is the situation with funding? Has funding been secured for the complete decommissioning process and if not, why not? What would happen if that funding were not forthcoming?

ANSWER

1. HIFAR was shut down in January 2007, and spent fuel and fluids were subsequently removed from the facility. ARPANSA granted ANSTO a licence to “possess or control” HIFAR in September 2008. Under that licence, the reactor is now in a ‘care and maintenance’ phase, during which non-radioactive equipment will be removed, characterisation of the remaining activity will take place and the reactor will be kept in a safe state whilst decay of short-lived radioactive materials within the reactor takes place. These processes precede decommissioning. Current planning is to commence dismantling of the reactor around 2017, following the receipt of relevant regulatory approvals for the decommissioning phase.
2. ANSTO has received sufficient funding to enable the current dismantling of essentially non-active components to proceed. It would not be consistent with normal budgetary processes for ANSTO to be funded now for activities that will not commence for some years. If funding for decommissioning was not forthcoming when needed, decommissioning would be delayed.