Opening statement

Senators, I'd like to take this opportunity to update the Committee on the exciting year ahead for ANSTO.

2013 is the 60th anniversary of the formation of our predecessor organisation, the Australian Atomic Energy Commission. Over the years, the vast majority of Australians have benefited in some way from the work done by our organisation, whether it is the medical and industrial applications of nuclear technology or by partnering with us to advance knowledge and innovation using nuclear techniques.

However our focus remains very much on the future.

With the recent changes to our Ministry, I was honoured to see that ANSTO's nuclear medicine project was listed by Senator Evans as one of two major achievements he was particularly proud of supporting during his tenure, the other being the Square Kilometre Array.

The nuclear medicine project is of major international significance. It will do much to ease an emerging international shortage of nuclear medicine. It will enhance the reputation of Australia as a major player in global healthcare provision, and showcase our world leading technique for safely immobilising nuclear waste, Synroc.

ANSTO recently participated in the Public Works Committee public inquiry to discuss this project in greater detail.

As well as being important for healthcare, this project is a very significant example to the rest of the world. It clearly demonstrates that there is no need for research reactors to use highly enriched uranium to make nuclear medicine, a development that has been welcomed internationally by organisations such as the US Department of Energy.

Nuclear security continues to be at the forefront of the agenda for leaders around the world, including our Prime Minister. As the centre of nuclear expertise in the country that, according to a recent study, ranks number one in the world for nuclear security, ANSTO is taking a lead role in the region.

ANSTO has a long and proud history of co-operating with the International Atomic Energy Agency to pioneer methods for achieving better safeguards outcomes, and this will continue.

However, nuclear medicine is only part of what Australia's OPAL research reactor is about.

Each year hundreds of researchers use neutron scattering to study structures at the atomic, molecular and nano-scale. Thanks to OPAL, Australia is the hub for a vibrant and exciting research community.

We are now seeing the fruits of exciting new research into areas such as environmentally friendly energy sources, finding ways to combat anti-biotic resistant bacteria, healthier food alternatives and nuclear security just to name a few.

This is not to mention a number of OPAL's other practical applications such as its uses irradiating silicon used in high tech applications, and providing support to the minerals sector.

We continue to play a key role in supporting the minerals industry. New facilities for the ANSTO Minerals team will play a vital role in the development of rare earths deposits. Rare earths elements are used in vital applications in magnets for industrial turbines, lenses, catalytic converters, aircraft engines and computer screens.

OPAL shows us how you can do great science with great infrastructure, and to that end we are not resting on our laurels.

On 1 January, ANSTO became the operator of the Australian Synchrotron under an agreement with the Australian Synchrotron Holding Company and with the support of a consortium of funders. 2013 is going to be a big year for improving the capabilities of our organisation, and we look forward to the challenges ahead.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Senator Evans for his engagement with and support for ANSTO in his term as Minister and we look forward to fostering continuing good relations with Minister Bowen.