



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties report:

Report 170

Regional Co-operative Agreement for Research, Development
and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology 2017

March 2018

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**Government Response to
Report 170 of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties:
Regional Co-operative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to
Nuclear Science and Technology 2017**

The Australian Government thanks the Committee for its consideration of the *Regional Co-operative Agreement for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology* ("the RCA"), done at Ulaanbaatar on 18 May 2016, and tabled on 8 February 2017. The Government appreciates the Committee's support for the RCA, and recognition of the valuable contribution Australia makes to the region through the RCA. The Government provides the following responses to the additional recommendations made by the Australian Greens.

Recommendation 1 - The Australian Greens recommend that there be periodic review of the cost and benefit of the Agreement to Australia. Periodic reviews should consider the research interests pursued under the Agreement to ensure that the Agreement is consistent with Australian laws and is in the public interest. Australia has the ability to opt out of the Agreement at any time, and this option should be considered during periodic reviews.

The Government does not accept this recommendation.

Existing arrangements within the RCA's governance structure are sufficient to ensure that the RCA continues to serve Australia's interests. Twice a year, RCA member states meet to review the RCA's management, strategy, programmes and outcomes. This provides all member states, including Australia, the opportunity to guide the RCA's governance and input into the important regional collaborative projects undertaken through the RCA.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Technical Cooperation program, including the RCA, is also aligned to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which have been endorsed by the Australian Government. This alignment ensures that the RCA remains relevant to global, regional and national development goals.

Recommendation 2 - Review section 3.31 of the Report. This section suggests that Australia's involvement contributes to our standing on nuclear weapons non-proliferation without acknowledging that Australia's international reputation on this issue has been damaged by the Government's ongoing refusal to engage in UN fora on the advancement of the abolition of nuclear weapons. This section also suggests that a "significant expansion of nuclear power is underway or being considered in the region." There is certainly no significant expansion of nuclear power, and the consideration of expanding nuclear power is neither significant nor noteworthy in the context of this agreement. The misrepresentation of Australia's current standing on non-proliferation issues and the global nuclear energy trajectory should not form part of Australia's justification for participating in this agreement.

The Government does not accept this recommendation or the claims it makes.

The Government continues Australia's proud record of working in UN and other fora towards the goal of a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons, and Australia's reputation on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament remains as strong as it has ever been. Achieving a world free of nuclear weapons is not a quick or easy task. It will take sustained, practical steps

which Australia has long supported, such as progress towards a fissile material cut-off treaty and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban treaty.

The Government declined to participate in recent negotiations on a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons ('ban treaty') after assessing that such a treaty would not be in Australia's national interests. The ban treaty will be ineffective in eliminating nuclear weapons and will deepen divisions between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states. It also risks undermining the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, by creating ambiguity and confusion through parallel obligations.

Active Australian participation in the RCA supports Australia's leadership role in the region in relation to nuclear non-proliferation, including through its designated seat on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors as the most advanced Member State in the South-East Asia and Pacific group in the peaceful applications of nuclear science and technology. In that context, Australia's active participation in the RCA is largely expected and highly valued. Non-participation in the RCA would likely call into question Australia's designated seat on the IAEA Board of Governors, and the significant influence that position brings to discussions on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the use of nuclear power, amongst other things.

Furthermore, and contrary to the claims made by the Australian Greens in Recommendation 2, nuclear power generation in the region covered by the RCA is significantly increasing. It is projected that nuclear power capacity in the region could increase by over 150 per cent by 2030¹. In particular, China is currently constructing 20 nuclear power reactors to add to its existing fleet of 37 (up from 11 in 2007)². An additional 40 are being actively planned in China, with many more proposed. India has six nuclear power reactors under construction, adding to its fleet of 22. An additional 19 are being actively planned in India, with many more being proposed³.

¹ This figure includes the regional groups "Middle East and South Asia", "South East Asia and the Pacific", and "Far East", as defined in the IAEA Statute. All RCA member states fall into one of these regional groups. International Atomic Energy Agency 2016, 'Energy, Electricity and Nuclear Power Estimates for the Period up to 2050', *Reference Data Series*, No.1, 2016 Edition, Vienna <http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/Publications/PDF/RDS-1-36Web-28008110.pdf>

² World Nuclear Association August 2017, *Nuclear Power in China*, World Nuclear Association, viewed 24 August 2017 <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-a-f/china-nuclear-power.aspx>

³ World Nuclear Association August 2017, *Nuclear Power in India*, World Nuclear Association, viewed 24 August 2017 <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-g-n/india.aspx>

