

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: Opal Reactor

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Eggleston

QUESTION No.: AI-2

You had already advised in previous estimates that the water leakage between the light and heavy waters of the OPAL reactor had been remedied in the short term and that a solution that would correct this issue for the whole operative life of OPAL was still being looked into. Could you please update us on how that situation is coming along?

ANSWER

The OPAL reactor is now operating routinely. The seepage is not yet resolved. OPAL commenced a planned shut down on 2 March 2009 for a period of almost a month, and part of the work undertaken during the shutdown involved testing and remedial work on the seepage sites. Various solutions are being investigated and trialled by ANSTO and INVAP, the designer of the reactor. Under the contract, INVAP is ultimately responsible for resolving the problem. The seepage mitigation program will continue to be developed through 2009.

Additionally, ANSTO is considering the installation of a Heavy Water Upgrade Plant, and has applied to ARPANSA for permission to construct such a plant. The purification plant would form part of the solution to the seepage and reduce or eliminate the need to undertake any heavy water changes in the future. Without the plant, there would be a need to shut the reactor down approximately every ten years to replace the heavy water.