



21 March 2025

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Dr Jane Canestra,
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Dear Dr Canestra

ARPANSA response to Council advice: Australian national preparedness and response capability for radiological emergencies

I would like to acknowledge the Radiation Health and Safety Advisory Council ('the Council') statement of 17 April 2024, your comprehensive overview of Australia's national preparedness and response capabilities for radiological emergencies and the Council's consideration of these matters. In my role as CEO of ARPANSA it is timely to formally respond to this advice.

As identified, a significant driver for enhancing capability in emergency preparedness and response is the delivery of Australia's sovereign conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarine program. This development is a timely reminder that Australia must be prepared for any radiological or nuclear emergency. It not only presents an opportunity to strengthen our national capabilities but also for ARPANSA to take a greater leadership role in supporting the preparedness, response and early recovery to a significant radiological or nuclear event.

I am pleased to report that the recently released Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) now describes the specific functions ARPANSA has been tasked under this framework.

The AGCMF is the Australian Government's capstone policy framing Australia's national crisis management arrangements. Importantly, it articulates responsibilities and accountabilities for Australian Government Ministers and their portfolios during nationally significant crises. The new AGCMF, released in September 2024 following extensive consultation across States, Territories, and Commonwealth agencies, reflects the most comprehensive update since its first publication in 2009, driven by experiences of recent crises and Australia's evolving threat outlook.

An important change in the AGCMF is the introduction of radiological / nuclear events as a standalone hazard for the Australian Government to manage, with ARPANSA designated as the

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Australian Government Coordination Agency and the Sector Lead Agency. Additionally, as CEO, I have been appointed as the Senior Coordinating Lead Official for such events. To operationalise ARPANSA's response to support States and Territories across the Commonwealth, we will develop the Australian Radiological and Nuclear Event Plan (AUSRNEPLAN).

The assignment of these roles to ARPANSA under the AGCMF ensures that our responsibilities in emergency preparedness and response, both for incidents involving our licensees and those occurring in States and Territories, are clearly defined and exercised. We will formalise these arrangements through the AUSRNEPLAN.

As developers of the AUSRNEPLAN, we have the unique opportunity to:

- Fully understand the capabilities of all States and Territories.
- Standardise responses to radiological and nuclear events across States and Territories while establishing arrangements for a coordinated federated response.
- Provide real-time products and GIS tools to demonstrate contamination spread, thereby offering a national decision support tool.
- Test the plan, thereby validating and leading preparedness efforts for radiological and nuclear event responses.
- Develop and advocate for the adoption of competencies for State and Territory responders through formalised training and education.

The development of the AUSRNEPLAN is likely to include mechanisms to regularly update national capability status within the health and laboratory capability, ensuring a clear understanding of our preparedness. Additionally, I recognize that the Australian clinical guidelines for radiological emergencies requires review, and ARPANSA has initiated steps towards this effort. This guidance will underpin and form part of the AUSRNEPLAN.

Our Emergency Management Team is currently formulating an approach to draft the AUSRNEPLAN and how we will implement its components nationally. I anticipate that this will see progress to address many of your concerns, and I propose that the Emergency Management Team briefs you in a future RHSAC meeting.

Of course, funding and our inherent capabilities and capacity will always pose constraints; however, we appreciate the Council's efforts in identifying areas for advancement and focus.

I look forward to providing further updates on these matters to Council as this work continues.

Yours sincerely,



Gillian Hirth AO

Chief Executive Officer

Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency