

Media release

6 December 2006

Planning Australian engagement in ITER fusion experiment

Over coming months, progress will be made on planning for Australians to engage in the world's largest science experiment, ITER, which is the forerunner of a fusion energy power reactor.

The Australian ITER Forum has started developing a plan for participation in ITER and to build the nation's capabilities in fusion energy in general.

An issues paper is being prepared for release mid-month. It will be published on the Forum's website, at www.ainse.edu.au/fusion/strat. Responses will be sought from across the Australian science community and industry sectors that could be involved in ITER. They will contribute to a strategy plan that will be published in the first part of 2007.

The initiative was a key outcome of a workshop held in October, when the Forum brought together international ITER team-members, and representatives of Australian industry, the research community and government to discuss how Australia can be involved in constructing, operating and using ITER.

"The ITER partners see strong potential for Australians to contribute, building on the nation's strengths, especially in fusion and materials research," said Dr Matthew Hole, Chair of the Australian ITER Forum.

"Now that the ITER Organisation has been formally established, we have a firm basis on which to move forward."

The ITER Organisation came into being with the signing in Paris of the ITER Agreement on 21 November, the same day on which the draft report of the Uranium Mining, Processing and Nuclear Energy Review (UMPNER) was released.

"The UMPNER draft report has pointed out that Australia needs to catch up in nuclear-energy R&D," Dr Hole said. "Australia needs to catch up in fusion R&D in particular. The emphasis in the UMPNER draft report on international collaborations is spot-on, and for fusion research that means engagement in ITER.

"Last Monday (4 December) the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry and Resources also gave strong support to Australian participation in ITER and development of our nation's fusion research effort, in its report on non-fossil fuel energy.

"We are thinking long-term in our planning and will be looking to build our national capacity in fusion science so we can take advantage of developments in decades to come.

"There is great excitement about the potential of fusion energy in these times of anxiety over climate change and energy security," Dr Hole added. "Fusion energy directly produces no greenhouse gas emissions and negligible radioactivity."

The ITER Organisation has seven members: the European Union, Japan, the People's Republic of China, India, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and the USA. The construction of ITER, at Cadarache in southern France, is estimated to cost five billion euro (\$8.4 billion) over 10 years.

For more information:

The Australian ITER Forum: www.ainse.edu.au/fusion

The ITER Organisation: www.iter.org

-ends-

Media contact: Miriam Goodwin, 0409 246 282