

MEETING OF RCA NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

MUMBAI, INDIA

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AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY PAPER

1. Overview

The RCA has since 1996 embarked on a radical and comprehensive restructuring to enable Member States to take on more responsibility for their programme. This is being done within the articles of the current Agreement. No other regional agreement has ever undertaken such an endeavour and the RCA initiative is all the more remarkable because it is being driven by the Member States. Out of the various RCA working groups initiated to bring about the changes has come a range of unique concepts and proposals such as:

- Lead Country Concept
- Regional Resource Units
- Use of regional expertise and facilities
- Sectorial (Thematic) Regional Project Management

However, not all the changes agreed by the Member States have yet been absorbed and implemented. In Australia's view it is timely to instigate actions to assist in ensuring the RCA moves ahead with these key initiatives.

2. Lead Country Concept

From Australia's observations, many Member States are finding difficulty with the translation of the Lead Country Concept into specific actions and responsibilities. Australia believes that the Lead Country Concept is an effective and efficient vehicle for Member States to achieve a greater active role in the totality of the project management in the programme and will introduce much needed project management skills that will have significant flow-on benefit nationally. To this end we reiterate our suggestion made at the 1999 RCA GCM that the Agency should consider organising a mission as required to Member States to assist current and prospective Lead Countries in the implementation of the new arrangements.

3. Use of regional expertise and facilities

In the conclusions and recommendations of recent National RCA Representative Meetings, the Agency has been called upon to make the use of regional expertise and facilities a priority in the implementation of project activities.

In Table 4 in the 1998 RCA Annual Report it was revealed that of a total of 53 expert missions carried out under the RCA programme, only 55% (number of both missions and time) were carried out by regional experts. 14 missions (26%) lasting a total of 123 days (29%) were carried out by experts from outside the region. There were a total of 8 missions by regional experts (19%) totalling 89 days (17%) to locations outside the region. Support from the IAEA came from 10 missions (19%) lasting 71 days (17%).

In the draft 1999 RCA Annual Report Annexure 11, there has been an improvement with 61 (66%) of the 93 expert missions being carried out by regional experts. These had a total duration of 742 days (71%). 19% of the total effort was used in supporting experts recruited from outside the region, who undertook 18 missions lasting a total of 196 days. There were a total of 20 missions by regional experts (22%) totalling 243 days (23%) to locations outside the region. IAEA support came in 13 missions (14%) for 109 days (10%).

Australia is pleased to see this improvement but would suggest that further increases in the use of regional expertise is both desirable and an appropriate recognition of the quality and standard of the available regional resources. Australia would like to propose that it would be appropriate to aim for a target of 10% for the total project mission time used by experts recruited from outside the region and a similar percentage for the recruitment of IAEA staff.

4. Sectorial (Thematic) Regional Project Management

The Report of the Working Group reviewing the management structure of the RCA was tabled at the 1996 RCA General Conference Meeting (GCM) in Vienna and contained a total of 12 recommendations. Nine were immediately adopted and a further two were adopted after further discussion at the 1997 RCA GCM. Recommendation 2 adopted in the first group set up the Sectorial (Thematic) structure for the more effective management of the RCA projects. The following five sectorial areas were established:

- Agriculture
- Health Care
- Industry and the Environment
- Energy Related and Research Reactor
- Radiation Protection

It was envisaged that there would be a major freeing up for the RCA National Representatives of their responsibilities for the technical programme through this devolution. In line with the agreed management arrangements and Article VI of the Agreement, each technical project has to be reviewed annually by a Project Committee comprising representatives of Member States and an IAEA representative. By investing the Project Committee responsibilities in the National Project Coordinators Meeting for a particular sectorial area, the RCA National Representatives would be able to concentrate more on the policy and planning issues. Such tasks are gaining increased importance as the Member States assume more of the responsibilities for the total RCA programme.

Recommendation 2, which relates to the sectorial project National Coordinators taking over the annual Project Committee work from the RCA National Representatives, is yet

to be effectively implemented across all the sectorial areas. Such meetings are essential in order to draw together the various project proposals and ongoing projects in a coordinated and cohesive manner within the particular sectorial area, as well as providing a window to the future. In consequence the RCA National Representatives are now overburdened having to progress not only the Project Committee work but also the increasing amount of work on policy, planning and management issues.

Australia urges the Agency to expedite the full implementation of this change without further delay.

The role of the National Project Coordinators is important not just in the Project Committee work but also in the implementation of the project activities. Tasks have been set for them to assist in getting the best use of project resources. For example they should be overseeing the nomination and selection of candidates for training events and fellowships to ensure that nationally the most appropriate person is provided with such opportunities. They should also be involved in assessing the effectiveness of the activity after its completion. However it has come to our notice that in some countries the National Project Coordinators are being by-passed in the implementation of the activities in their area. They are not being circulated with the information from their National Representative or the RCA Office. The names of the National Project Coordinators and their contact details are no longer listed in the RCA Annual Report and this lack of visibility has an impact on efficient communications between Member States.

For Australia the issue of the effective utilisation of National Project Coordinators is regarded as very important and National Representatives are urged to ensure that they are passing on the information to the National Project Coordinators and are allowing them to undertake those actions that they have been tasked to fulfill. The RCA Office is urged to provide comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible listings of the National Project Coordinators and this could be effectively done in the RCA Annual report which acts as a reference book to assist Member States. The names could also be included on the web page under the relevant area.

5. Ownership of Projects

In the evolution of the RCA, much focus has been given to the need to have increased ownership of the projects by the Member States and with this ownership goes increased accountability. The use of the Lead Country concept and other changes has been very useful in assisting in this change and all Member States will have been able to point to their increased involvement in all aspects of the RCA programme. Australia has no doubt of the value and the desirability of the changes.

There have been suggestions that a logical move in the progress to independence would be for project implementation to be outsourced to Member States. While there are positive advantages in this approach, we would like to share our experience with Member States on one aspect. In the Australian extrabudgetary projects there is a situation that is very similar to an outsourced project. The detailed technical structure has been

developed and approved without the involvement of an IAEA Technical Officer and this role has been effectively taken over by the Australian Project Manager, who also becomes the *de facto* Technical Officer for implementation. Although IAEA Technical Officers are appointed, there is little practical involvement for them in the projects. The result is that the Technical Officers have no "ownership" of or allegiance to that project - in fact there is alienation. The result is that there is no advocate within the IAEA Technical Divisions to support, promote, defend, or otherwise look after the project's interests in relation to the other projects in their portfolio. This is neither a designed nor a desirable outcome.

Australia proposes to work with the Agency to develop strategies to address this problem and to promote the integration of the Agency's Technical Officers into the RCA projects at all stages of the project life and to increase their "ownership" of them.

6. Annual Report

As has been discussed at a number of RCA National Representatives Meetings, the RCA Annual Report has to fulfill a number of requirements, but one of the most important is for it to be an effective means to inform and promote the RCA programme. The working paper tabled by Indonesia and Australia at the 1999 RCA GCM reiterated the pressing need to raise the profile of the RCA by more effectively "selling" the achievements and outcomes of the Programme.

In our opinion the content of the current draft RCA Annual Report for 1999 still does not achieve this objective and, for example, the list of success stories in Part II of the report are not suitable in their present form. The newsworthy and exciting information available from the projects is not finding its way through the project networks to the project National Coordinators or the RCA National Representatives. As part of their responsibility for project evaluation review and analysis, Lead Countries need to ensure that the information on project achievements is extracted and presented effectively. This aspect will be one of the tasks included in the proposal for missions to Lead Countries mentioned above in Section 1.

7. New Project Proposals

Australia notes the information on the 20 new project proposals and one extension proposal that has been distributed in preparation for this meeting. From information in the draft Annual Report, 13 projects are to be carried over into 2001 and it is expected that there will be approximately 13 new projects giving a total of 26. This is a 50% increase over the 1990/1995 level.

In the establishment of the 2001-2002 Programme and future biennia, Member States should be mindful of the recommendations that have come from different sources, that there should be fewer but larger projects to make the best impact and minimise administrative overheads. Australia strongly supports this position and recalls that many Member States have stressed the need for projects to deliver the maximum resources to participating countries.

We believe that a successful programme has to be based on properly defined and scoped projects, with meaningful and realistic outputs and outcomes and where progress can be readily monitored and evaluated from the achievements and milestones set in the project plan. In addition, since the RCA programme is involved in the application of nuclear technologies, there has to be a demonstrated key nuclear component to justify the project's adoption.

8. Links with other Regional Organisations

Australia believes that the establishment of strong collaborative linkages with other regional organisations is essential for the long-term viability of the RCA, particularly as the nuclear component frequently represents only a small part of the overall solution to a complex problem. We would encourage all Member States singly and collectively to enhance their contacts with other regional organisations and seek to gain their involvement in projects that will showcase the benefits of nuclear techniques. We recommend that there should be a specific agenda item in each National Representatives Meeting to specifically review progress in this area and record actions of individual Member States.

Australia notes that next week, following this national representatives meeting, the Agency is participating in a consultative meeting at which representatives from ESCAP, ADIP, ASEAN, UNESCO, UNEP and UNDP/GEF/IMO are expected to attend. We welcome this initiative aimed at strengthening linkages and the initiation of cooperative projects between the RCA and other multilateral organisations and will follow these developments with interest.

9. Conclusion

As Member States are aware, the major management changes occurring in RCA are being carefully watched and our performance is going to be critically examined. Because our approach is different to the other two regional agreements there will inevitably be comparisons with alternative approaches. We would remind RCA Member States that our underlying management structure with such features as our comprehensive network of National Project Coordinators and regular meetings has been in place for some considerable time. The shift in responsibilities from the Agency to Member States does not affect the basic structure. It was this structure that has produced the success of the RCA Programme over the years. This evaluation is not just our assertion. In 1995 The UN Joint Inspection Unit gave a fully independent assessment of the performance of the UNDP/RCA/IAEA Industrial project and another of other regional projects undertaken by other agencies. Our project scored 96 out of 100, the best review ever made of a project in the field of science and technology.

Australia looks forward to the RCA continuing as a visible and influential player in the peaceful application of nuclear science and technology in the region.