

MINUTES OF THE SECOND MEETING OF
THE NATIONAL RADIATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE PHYSICS DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, ON AUGUST 5TH, 1957

PRESENT

[REDACTED] (Chairman)

[REDACTED] (Secretary)

1. MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING.

(a) Discussion

[REDACTED] who had not been present at the first meeting, considered that the functions and constitutional limitations of the Committee were not correctly indicated in the minutes. In his view the functions of the Committee were wholly advisory and not executive - that it must present its advice to the Prime Minister and not cut across normal Departmental channels. After discussion several alterations to the minutes were agreed upon to meet these objections.

The Committee, however, stressed that its most important function was to allow informal discussion between the Chairmen of the three executive groups concerned and the unofficial members of the Committee on all matters dealing with radiation hazards, and in practice - although not formally - to endeavour to expedite any necessary action. While the Committee did not possess executive authority it was agreed that it should feel free to press strongly through the appropriate channels for the initiation of any action it might feel to be necessary, and under special circumstances to carry out preliminary investigations under its own authority.

The function of the Committee in receiving and distributing relevant information from overseas and internal sources was also stressed without any claim that it should be the only recipient of primary information.

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(b) Amendments to the minutes of the first meeting

(i) Page 2, section (2) shall read:-

"For the same reason I feel that it is essential that this Committee receive and distribute information on its field - that it should receive in each significant field in Australia."

(ii) Page 3, section (1) shall read:-


"The N.R.A.C. has the overall function of advising the Commonwealth Government on the problems arising from the use of ionising radiations as these may affect human, animal, and plant life. It is the task of this Committee to advise the Prime Minister of measures necessary to ensure that the health and welfare of the Australian community is safeguarded in these matters and to define the levels of radiation which are appropriate to the legitimate needs of medicine, defence, industry, education, and scientific research. The Committee will receive and distribute information on its field. Through those of its members who sit on the International Committee on Radiological Protection, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and on other similar bodies, the N.R.A.C. will convey its views to those bodies and will receive from them relevant information on radiation hazards. It will also receive automatically all confidential and public reports issued by Commonwealth instrumentalities in this field, and relevant information for any other Australian sources."

(iii) Page 4, section (a) shall read:-


"The N.R.A.C. expects to be the senior advisory committee and should be prepared to initiate action in some fields at least

It must insist on its receiving all information needed to allow it to know what is happening with medical-genetic implications, what precautions are being taken and to what extent the safety measures prove effective."

(iv) Page 5, fourth paragraph shall read:-

 emphasised that the N.R.A.C. was the overall authority and the Safety Committee was only one of the committees to which the N.R.A.C. should give authoritative advice.

2. THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ON HIS DISCUSSIONS IN THE U.K.

This was tabled and it was agreed that full discussion be deferred until next meeting. In view, however, of the importance of action to diminish the population dose from medical x-rays,  was asked to make any use which seemed appropriate of the relevant section of the report in the discussions of the Radiation Hazards Committee of the N.H.M.R.C.



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It was also agreed to forward a formal resolution through the Prime Minister's Department drawing the attention of this committee to the section of the report entitled "Principles for Reducing the Medical Hazards".

3. RADIATION LEVELS FOR FORTHCOMING WEAPONS TESTS

The proposed fall-out levels for the forthcoming test series were tabled by [REDACTED].

The Committee agreed to a resolution proposed by [REDACTED] that, "the levels of radiation proposed by the Safety Committee as tabled at this meeting be approved as safe levels for the atomic weapons tests to be held at Maralinga in 1957."

4. LEGISLATION CONCERNING THE USE OF IONIZING RADIATION

The Secretary had discussed the question of the competence of the Commonwealth Government to pass legislation concerning ionizing radiation with members of the Prime Minister's Department and also the Assistant Crown Solicitor. It was apparent that except for Defence or International obligations, action would most probably be taken through the States individually or through such bodies as the Commonwealth States Committee.

[REDACTED] a member of this committee, then outlined its scope; its first meeting will be held on 29th August and the N.R.A.C. was assured that the minutes would be forwarded. [REDACTED] made reference to the Radioactive Substances Act passed in N.S.W., W.A. and Tasmania and suggested that similar legislation could be passed by the Commonwealth Government to be effective in Commonwealth Territories.

5. INTER-TRIAL FALL-OUT DATA

[REDACTED] tabled a report on the results of fall-out sampling carried out by the Safety Committee over the period 22nd November, 1956 to 30th June, 1957, subsequent to the weapon tests in 1956. The Safety Committee has intentions of eventually publishing this data.

The I.G.Y. Committee has asked for data on fall-out, and it was resolved that it was not for the N.R.A.C. to send on such information, this should be done by the Safety Committee through the Secretary, Department of Supply.

6. BLOOD COUNTING AT MARALINGA

This question was referred to the N.R.A.C. by the Safety Committee which had been asked to give its opinion on the value of the data which might be extracted from blood count records for Service personnel posted to Maralinga. The Safety Committee had been of the opinion that blood counting was of little value, the film badge being a more sensitive detector of low level radiation. The Committee concurred on this point and resolved that the N.R.A.C. doubts if any useful information can be obtained from blood counting in relation to weapon tests.

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7. PRESS RELEASE

The Committee decided that there should be no press statement after the meeting from the Committee as such, however the proposed press publication of the Chairman's article "The Hazards of Radiation" was strongly supported. After some discussion it was agreed that this should be released under [redacted] own name and that the Committee should undertake to produce something in the nature of a White Paper for the Prime Minister at some later date.

8. INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

(a) Australian Participation in the Standardization Programme of the Measurement of ⁹⁰Sr.

The difficulty of comparing ⁹⁰Sr measurements from various countries was discussed; the point was made that the sample analysis was exacting and only the most competent laboratories could be considered to give reliable results.

From [redacted] suggestion it was resolved that the N.R.A.C. should take part in the United Nations ⁹⁰Sr standardization programme and that within Australia the work should be entrusted to the laboratories of the Commonwealth X-Ray and Radium Laboratory and the Australian Atomic Energy Commission. The standard ⁹⁰Sr samples should be made available exclusively to these two laboratories.

(b) Conference on the Law of the Sea

The question of disposal of radioactive material was discussed; [redacted] gave some indication of the extent of the existing legislation. [redacted] pointed out that in the A.A.E.C.'s view the matter would need serious consideration in two to three year's time. It is important that the regulations laid down should not only prevent misuse but should also give positive direction.

It was agreed that the following resolution relating to disposal of radioactive wastes should be passed to the Prime Minister's Department:-

"The Committee feels that the time has come when information should be collected and considerations given to such laws as may be necessary. The appropriate Commonwealth Departments should be asked to investigate with a view to legislation."

9. N.R.A.C. MEMBERSHIP

No action was taken on suggestions that a diagnostic radiologist and/or a geneticist be added to the N.R.A.C.

10. THE NEXT MEETING

The third meeting of the N.R.A.C. will be held at the Atomic Energy Commission Offices, Coogee, Sydney, at 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday, November 6th, 1957.

Approved

[redacted]
Chairman

[redacted]
Secretary

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