Opening Remarks to NRU EA Hearing
June 29, 2005
Robert Van Adel
President and Chief Executive Officer

Good morning Madam Chair and members of the Commission, and thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today about the Environmental Assessment for the operation of the NRU beyond 2005. For the record, I am Robert Van Adel, President and CEO of AECL.

I am accompanied here today by Dr. David Torgerson, Senior Vice-President, Technology and Chief Technology Officer for AECL; Dr. Paul Fehrenbach, Vice-President of the Nuclear Laboratories Business Unit; as well as key members of the AECL team who have been working on this very important project.

In 1996, AECL informed the Atomic Energy Control Board that the NRU reactor would not continue operating beyond 2005. That decision was based on the assumption that a replacement facility would be operating by now.

That has not happened, so NRU continues to be an important source of medical isotope production, and is Canada's premier facility for nuclear power research, and materials research.

We believe that it is essential to continue operating NRU to meet these needs until a longer-term solution is developed.

As the world's largest source of medical radionuclides, NRU provides more than 34,000 treatments every day. NRU also produces the majority of the world's medical isotopes including molybdenum-99 and several longer-lived isotopes such as Cobalt-60, which is used for cancer therapy. Production of these longer-lived isotopes will

continue in NRU after the Dedicated Isotope Facility is fully operational.

NRU is the only facility capable of meeting the R&D needs of Canada's worldwide CANDU power program. Access to a world-class domestic research reactor remains essential for the continued sustainability and growth of AECL as both a Canadian Centre of Excellence in nuclear R & D and as a commercial vendor of CANDU reactors and reactor services.

NRU is also of significant importance to the Canadian nuclear industry and to the Canadian scientific research community. It is the only source of neutrons for the National Research Council's Canadian Neutron Beam Centre which hosts independent and collaborative research projects with professors and students from 23 Canadian universities and by scientists from 115 institutions in 19 countries.

NRU is a multipurpose research reactor that continues to deliver enormous benefits to Canadians and people around the world every day.

In contrast to countries with larger populations where single-purpose reactors are common, NRU is a classic Canadian solution that provides a wide range of capabilities to Canada's diverse science and technology communities. It is a tribute to the scientists and engineers of that time that NRU remains world-class nearly 50 years later.

AECL takes pride in operating and maintaining NRU in a safe and in an environmentally sound manner.

Since 1996 AECL has invested more than $30 million in physical improvements to NRU to ensure and improve its safety. To date we have installed seven safety upgrades and five are already in-service.

AECL is investing an additional $10 million in the NRU Licensability Extension program. We have completed a comprehensive update of the NRU Safety Report, and thoroughly assessed the condition of the

facility to make sure it is fit to continue to operate. And we have a robust aging management program in which we continuously replace and upgrade equipment as required.

Our proposal is to continue operating NRU in its current configuration until about 2012. We are in discussion with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the National Research Council about the future of NRU beyond 2012. Several options are being discussed, including a major refurbishment of NRU, replacing NRU with a new multi-purpose facility, or building several new reactors, each to meet a specific NRU function.

Those discussions will carry on for some time, but we are here today to discuss the environmental assessment for continuing operation of NRU to about 2012.

While CNSC staff has issued a screening report for the NRU Environmental Assessment, AECL has been continuously monitoring and proactively taking steps to improve the environmental performance of NRU and our other facilities at Chalk River.

I'm pleased to report that in May of last year, AECL was successful in obtaining ISO-14001 Environmental Management System certification for the Chalk River Laboratories.

This standard calls for a continuous effort to improve environmental performance, and we are committed to this effort.

We completed an Ecological Effects Review for the Chalk River site in 2004, which the CNSC staff has accepted, and shared the results with the First Nations, citizens' groups and other key stakeholders through a series of meetings in January.

We have also issued our Environmental Plan for 2005/2006, which identifies the projects we are upgrading to the ISO 14001 standard. We agree with the conclusion of CNSC staff's screening report, that continued operation of the NRU will pose minimal risk to the environment.

AECL has worked hard to make information on the environmental assessment and AECL's request to continue operation of NRU accessible to our stakeholders. We have provided many opportunities for our stakeholders to make suggestions and voice their concerns including: letters and offerings of briefings to federal, provincial and municipal elected officials in Renfrew and Pontiac Counties; to the Chief and Council of the Algonquin First Nations; and to identified citizens' groups and through four public information sessions held in our key communities near the facility. All of this information has been posted on our website.

The results of the consultation activities support the CNSC staff's recommendation that the EA be approved. The Commission has received several letters of support for continued operation of NRU, and we are very appreciative of the support and interest from our community stakeholders.

In conclusion, the continued operation of NRU is vital to Canadians and to thousands of people around the world. We have invested in safety upgrades to the facility and are implementing programs to ensure that NRU continues to operate safely. We intend to demonstrate to the satisfaction of CNSC staff and the Commission that AECL is fully capable of operating of NRU safely beyond 2005. Should the Commission accept the EA, I can confirm that AECL has the resources and the people to operate the facility in a safe and environmentally sound manner.

Thank you and this concludes my remarks.