

All options open for new reactor

GOVERNMENT KEEPS
DOOR OPEN TO
NEW NRU

BY TERRY MYERS



The National Research Universal (NRU) reactor at Chalk River will mark 60 years of operation this Friday.

With the NRU reactor at Chalk River set to mark 60 years of operation Friday, the federal government says it wants to keep all options open after the reactor shuts down for good at the end of next March.

In its official response to the report of a parliamentary committee studying the future of the nuclear industry in Canada, the government says it “recognizes the potential value” of a new research reactor.

But in terms of a “long-term solution” to the need for a new “high-flux neutron source,” the government believes that “the full range of options for charting a way forward should be considered.”

That could mean anything from relying on “foreign facilities,” to building a new “multi-purpose nuclear research reactor,” to changing the focus of Canadian nuclear research to “other areas.”

“Accordingly, the government is engaging with stakeholders in nuclear R&D, the broader user community of neutron beams in Canada, and potential partners to explore the full range of possible options and models for access to high flux neutrons.

“Through these discussions, the government will seek to identify possible solutions based on partnerships that bring together federal and provincial governments, academia, industry, and international partners to support scientific research by Canadians for the benefit of Canadians.”

The comments are contained in the official “government of Canada” response to a report issued this summer by the House of Commons committee on natural resources.

Called “The Nuclear Sector at a Crossroads: Fostering Innovation and Energy Security for Canada and the World,” the wide ranging report contained seven major recommendations.

Among those recommendations, the committee urged the federal government to “continue its support for Canadian nuclear R&D and innovation in the short, medium and long term, by... considering long-term options to provide a reliable, high-flux neutron source for Canadian researchers.”

In its response, the government says it “agrees with this recommendation, which aligns with the (theme)... of establishing lasting partnerships across the sector to bring industry to the next level.”

“Partnerships between government, academia, and industry are key to ensuring access to the facilities, support, and expertise that the sector needs advance research, development, and innovation in nuclear science and technology.”

The government says it “recognizes the potential value of a new high-flux neutron source for Canadian researchers.”

“A high-flux research reactor could enable ongoing fuel, materials and safety research to support reliable, low-cost, low-carbon electricity to power Canada and its

economy.

“It could also support emerging opportunities, including the development of the next generation of nuclear energy technologies such as small and very small modular reactors that may be suited to providing clean energy to northern communities and remote mining installations.”

IMPACTS

The government says it also recognizes that, “although the science and technology mission at Chalk River Laboratories is much broader than just the NRU reactor, its shutdown will have impacts on nuclear research and development in Canada.”

“The NRU is used to test and develop fuel, produce medical and industrial isotopes, and enable materials research, including through the Canadian Neutron Beam Centre.

“As these capabilities cannot be fully replicated at other

facilities in Canada, researchers will inevitably lose access to a high-flux neutron source in Canada with NRU’s closure.”

When it comes to a new reactor, however, the government says all options are on the table.

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Options open for new NRU

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In the short term, research “could be maintained by securing agreements for Canadian researchers to access to high-flux neutrons sources at foreign facilities,” it says.

In the medium term, “a portion of the research community’s needs could be met” by expanding “neutron beamlines and operations at McMaster’s Nuclear Research Reactor, which will be Canada’s largest research reactor following closure of NRU.”

In the longer term, “domestic access to a source of high-flux neutrons could be restored” with the construction of a “multi-purpose nuclear research reactor” or a “non-reactor, accelerator-based source.”

Or maybe the money should just go somewhere else. “The resources needed to secure access to a high-flux neutron source could be used to to build Canadian expertise in other areas of nuclear science and materials science research,” the government says.

BIG SCIENCE

While a new reactor is not yet in the works, the government says it is investing in the Chalk River labs to make sure they “have the facilities and infrastructure needed to continue to be a hub for nuclear innovation in Canada.”

Overall, the government will invest \$1.2 billion in Chalk River over 10 years.

“These investments are intended to create a ‘big science’ infrastructure for the broad benefit of all those in Canada wishing to leverage its capabilities, accessible to academics, industry experts, and others - including small companies.”

“The government of Canada is committed to engaging with industry to understand their innovation, research, and development goals, and to identify how the federal government can work in partnership with industry, provinces, and academia to ensure researchers, experts, and small businesses continue to have access to the services and infrastructure they need to excel in their pursuits.”

The federal government announced in early 2015 that NRU would be shut down for good as of March 31, 2018.

In his announcement, former Minister of Natural Resources Greg Rickford said Canadian Nuclear Laboratories will “continue to advance world-class nuclear science and technology, providing valuable expertise to government and industry.”

At the same time, however, Rickford noted that “unexpected shutdowns” of NRU have resulted in “significant costs to taxpayers, including a \$114 million investment in 2009 to return it to service and an addi-

tional \$351 million between 2008 and 2016 to ensure safe and reliable operations.”

Speaking to members of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission later that year, former president and CEO of CNL Dr Bob Walker said the company could maintain its “core capabilities” for a “gap period” of up to 10 years after the shutdown of NRU in 2018.

“Certainly we have had a large research reactor at Chalk River for decades, and so a period of time without a research reactor will require adjustment,” Walker told commission members.

But Walker also reminded commission members that while NRU is important, CNL has other “centres of excellence.”

“We have many, many other important dimensions that are the backbone of this industry, and the fact that we have significant investments coming forward by the government of Canada to maintain those capabilities is also recognized and valued...”

“The question on a research reactor, I think, is a matter for going forward.”

EXPENSIVE

Last spring, the new president and chief executive officer of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd, Richard Sexton, told a public meeting in Deep River that AECL is “building a science future” at Chalk River in partnership with CNL.

“In 10 years we hope to have and we will have a new science and technology campus.

“This will be a site that attracts the best and the bright-

est, a site that people will want to come to,” he said.

But CNL will have to do it without the NRU reactor, Sexton added.

During a brief public question period, Sexton said the decision to close NRU at the end of March 2018 was a government decision based largely on cost.

“The NRU is a 60-year-old reactor. It’s difficult at times to maintain and expensive to operate,” he said.

“All of the federal family understands that NRU will shut down (next year). We have to move on.”

“Sixty years is a long time for any facility and especially a reactor. You should be proud that you got 60 years out of it.”

He said making the decision the way the government did has allowed for NRU to be shut down in “an organized way” rather than as the result of a crisis situation.

“I’m sure many would not want to see it happen but it makes sense from my point of view.”

As far as going back to the government to lobby for NRU to remain open, Sexton said that’s not going to happen.

“All of the federal family understands that NRU will shut down (next year),” he said.

“That was a decision made by the government before I was here. We have to move on.”

FEATURE PHOTO

Each week, the North Renfrew Times will include a photo from the local area as part of its new nameplate banner on the front page. If you have a photo you would like to submit, email it to <NRT@magma.ca>.

This week’s photo: “Fall on the Ottawa River,” by Kate Taylor.



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 NEW PRICE 27 Gleason Ln Sunfilled open concept, patio door to 3 season room, lg deck, fin bsmt, 1.4c MLS 1072488 \$294,900	 59 Townline Rd 1 bed frame bungalow, full basement, single det garage, private back yard MLS 1074621 \$68,900	 40460 Hwy 17W 2+1 bed, main flr family room & laundry, screen porch, det heat garage, 2.9 ac. MLS 1080876 \$162,500	 3 Hillcrest 1.5 storey, 3 bed 2 baths, fireplace, family room w/river view, new gas furn MLS 1059557 \$239,900	 43 Ottawa St 4 bed, 2 bath, sun-filled kitchen, deck overlooking private yard, bsmt fam rm MLS 987804 \$213,000	 185 Ridge Rd 3+1 bed, 2 bath, gas fireplace in bsmt fam rm, att dbl garage insulated w/gas, c/a MLS 908873 \$199,900
 251 Thomas St 4 bed, 3 bath, new hardwood flooring, eat in kitchen with patio door to deck MLS 902323 \$379,900	 105 Dufferin Ave 3 bedroom, 3 baths, private yard, large master bed, 2400 sq. ft., garage MLS 1000728 \$279,900	 69 Forest Ave Extensively renovated 3 bed, 1 1/2 baths, fin bsmt, fenced yard, gas heat MLS 1066118 \$189,900	 120 Lance Rd 1 bed, mn floor laundry, large kitchen & living room, rural setting, close to trails MLS 1072207 \$43,000	 WATER FRONT 634 Goldfinch Way. River front, 2 bed, 2 baths, double garage, 98 ft. sand beach, full furnished. MLS# 1065337 \$289,900	 27 Hunter's Run Beautifully maintained Nabco mobile home. Bright, spacious & on private lot. MLS 1074636 \$55,000
 72 Ottawa St 2 bed, 2 bath, gas heat, large lot, eat in kitchen with oak cupboards MLS 980442 \$149,900	 44 Joseph St 2+1 bedroom, 1.5 baths, oak kitchen, finished basement, attached garage MLS 1053896 \$239,900	 3 Highland Cr 3+1 bed, 2 bath newer gas furn/ca, hardwood & laminate, 3 season solarium MLS 1060010 \$178,200	 34554 Hwy 17 3 + 1 bed, full fin basement, attached carport, drilled well. Quick Closing. MLS 1061816 \$229,000	 33020 Hwy 17 3 bed, 2 bath newer gas furnace, and metal roof. Close to hospital, golf course MLS 1017438 \$89,900	 WATER FRONT 70 Sandpiper Ln Ottawa River cottage, 3 bed, electric/wood ht, drilled well, 96' river frontage MLS 1074667 \$185,000
 52 Frontenac Cr 3+1 bed, 2 baths, oak kitchen, laminate floors, fin bsmt, appliances incl MLS 1054986 \$219,900	 39 Huron Ave 2 bed, updated kitchen, 4pce bath, new roof, windows, gas ht/ca/fp, single gar MLS# 1070895 \$164,900	 17 Sumac Ct 3 Bedroom, 2 bath, full basement, new quality windows, new gas furnace. MLS 960007 \$189,900	 31 Alder Cr Great starter home open concept kitchen/living area hardwood flr, large backyard MLS 1049772 \$139,900	 46 Wolfe Ave Renovated 2 bed, 1 bath, open concept, gas fp, high end appliances, dbl det garage MLS 1064109 \$169,900	 6 Hillcrest St 2 bed, 1 bath, hrdwd flrs, updated windows/roof, walk out backyard to shopping MLS 1011051 \$99,900