Media Release

Nuclear support and awareness increasing - survey

New community research shows increased awareness of nuclear science and strong support for a nuclear facility in Australia.

An ANSTO¹ survey reveals that people are more comfortable with the new nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights south of Sydney than they were when last surveyed in 2004 with over ¾ of southern Sydney residents regarding the facility as safe.

Significantly 90% see the presence of an Australian nuclear science and technology facility as important.

More people are aware of what ANSTO does in applying nuclear science to improving the health of Australians, particularly in cancer treatment, and understanding and resolving our environmental problems.

Southern Sydney residents feel the new OPAL nuclear reactor, which commenced operation almost a year ago, is safer than the old reactor. Perceptions that it is safe have risen 12% to 77% over the past three years and public feeling that is unsafe is down 13% to 19%.

Community interest in nuclear issues is very strong with 62% wanting to know more about the products from the nuclear reactor and how nuclear waste is managed.

Mr Andrew Humpherson, ANSTO’s General Manager of Public Affairs said “We were pleased to find that people seemed to know more about what ANSTO does when results were compared to an almost identical study held in 2004,” he said

“Overall ANSTO’s performance in the eyes of the community has improved with notable increases in perceptions of safety, innovation, nuclear research and technology,” said Mr Humpherson.

“We also found that the community wanted to know more about ANSTO and its work, particularly in relation to radioactive waste, safety and security.

“ANSTO’s high level role internationally in nuclear safety is not well known and is another area where our expertise is providing benefits globally.

“These are all areas we will focus on over the next couple of years to ensure more people have more information,” Mr Humpherson said.

“One of ANSTO’s key objectives is to increase public awareness of the many applications of nuclear science

“The community also sees that whilst ANSTO may be a terror target it is lesser target than the airport, an oil refinery or the harbour bridge.

“With reference to the current public debate on nuclear power 83% were comfortable for ANSTO to play a role with 9% opposed. Many see ANSTO as a credible source of information on nuclear power.

¹ Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation
“Some incorrect myths about ANSTO remain with 13% believing ANSTO does nuclear weapons research and 38% believing that ANSTO operates nuclear power plants.

“ANSTO does no weapons research and the OPAL reactor produces no power but as a multipurpose research reactor produces neutrons for research, nuclear medicines and irradiates commercial products.

75% of survey respondents were aware of ANSTO’s involvement in nuclear medicine, 70% of ANSTO’s research work, 57% of the responsibility to manage nuclear waste, and 43% of work done in environment research.

Quantum Market Research, an independent research organisation, conducted the telephone survey of 550 residents of Sutherland, Bankstown and Illawarra as well as 150 from Adelaide.

The full marketing research report is available at www.ansto.gov.au

For more information and to arrange interviews please call Sharon Kelly, ANSTO Media Adviser on (02) 9717 9575 or 0400 394 085