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Green light for nuclear medicine project

Stone (Murray, Vic) said she believed passenger safety had improved over the past 10 years, but work needs to be done to ensure standards are maintained as the sector grows.

The local cruise ship industry is booming, with numbers of passengers boarding at Australian ports approaching one million per year.

“We’ve just got to make sure that as an Australian citizen that even when you leave our waters and end up in the Mediterranean, you’re protected and our policing can reach you without any jurisdictional issues,” Dr Stone said.

Despite the cruise industry’s efforts to make their ships safer, NSW Police Force assistant commissioner Mark Hutchings told the inquiry there were still 27 serious incidents on board cruise ships leaving Sydney reported to NSW police in the past 19 months, including eight deaths from natural causes.

“Eleven of those were assaults, all of which were notified and two of these incidents resulted in police arresting the offender – one was a juvenile and the other was an adult,” Mr Hutchings said.

“There have been four sexual assaults notified to the marine area command, one resulted in a brief of evidence being compiled and referred to the AFP, as the incident occurred beyond NSW jurisdictions.”

However Ms Sherry said these figures should not be used to create a perception that cruise ships are dangerous places.

“One of the challenges when you come to an investigation like this parliamentary inquiry is it feels like it’s something that happens all the time – it’s extremely rare,” Ms Sherry said. ●

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The construction of a new \$168 million nuclear medicine facility at Lucas Heights in New South Wales has been supported by federal parliament’s Public Works Committee.

The new facility will produce Molybdenum-99 (Mo-99), a nuclear medicine product crucial to the detection of life threatening diseases.

Enough Mo-99 will be produced by the proposed new facility to guarantee Australia’s future supply and meet a significant proportion of the global demand for the medicine, which currently totals around 45 million doses a year.

A supporting facility is also planned to convert the nuclear waste by-products of Mo-99 production into a synthetic rock product called Synroc, allowing the waste to be stored and transported safely.

Concerns about the proposals were raised by the Sutherland Shire Council, which questioned whether they may lead to Lucas Heights becoming a long-term nuclear waste storage site and starting to process nuclear waste imported from other countries.

These concerns were magnified by what the council claimed was a lack of detail relating to the size and scale of the proposed Mo-99 operations in the original application by the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO).

“This lack of basic information on the size and capacity of these facilities

represents a major deficiency in the public consultation process.”

The chief executive of ANSTO Adi Paterson moved to address these fears at a public hearing of the inquiry, confirming Lucas Heights cannot be considered as a long-term waste storage site and saying ANSTO had no plans to begin processing foreign nuclear waste.

“I believe we have a duty and a burden to continue to communicate with stakeholders in the shire and in the broader region,” Dr Paterson said. “But I do not think there are any fundamental issues that would in any way compromise the quality of the thinking and the planning that has underpinned this application.”

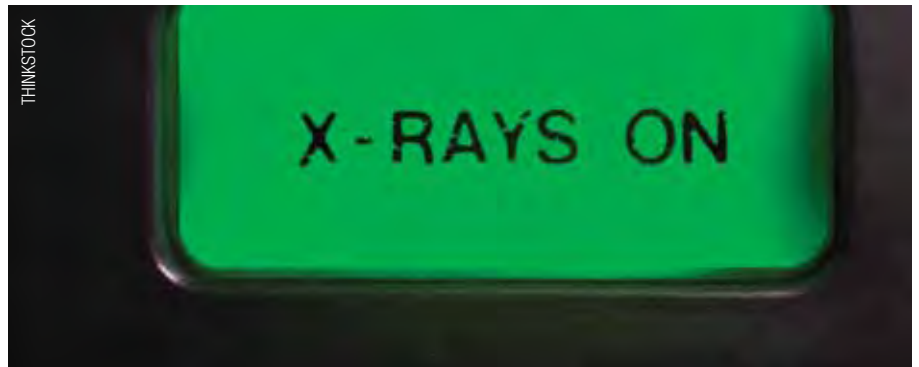
In its report the committee said it was satisfied there was a need for the works, which will replace existing facilities that will reach the end of their useful life in 2017.

However it acknowledged concerns about a lack of detail and consultation, requesting ANSTO continue to engage with the local council and the community on the project and deal with issues directly as they arise.

“In future, ANSTO should endeavour to provide more comprehensive detail in its initial submissions wherever possible,” the report stated. ●

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GLOWING ENDORSEMENT: Support for nuclear medicine production