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IAEA concludes follow-up review of Malaysia rare earth plant

Putrajaya, Malaysia – An international IAEA expert team has concluded a follow-up mission to conduct an independent review of radiation safety at the Lynas rare earth processing facility near Kuantan in Malaysia, which generates very low level radioactive waste.

The mission, carried out at the request of the Malaysian government, reviewed progress on <u>11</u> recommendations made by the IAEA international review mission to the Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (LAMP) in June 2011, while the plant was under construction.

The eight-member IAEA team met officials from national and local government, Malaysia's Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB), staff of Lynas Corporation Ltd and a broad range of other stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations and local residents. It also visited the plant, which has been operating since 2012.

"The IAEA team was very pleased with the openness of the Malaysian institutions, Lynas and other stakeholders in providing information and views. This was very helpful for our understanding of the situation," said team leader Juan Carlos Lentijo, Director of the Division of Nuclear Fuel Cycle and Waste Technology in the IAEA's Department of Nuclear Energy.

In its preliminary observations, the follow-up mission found that good progress had been made in implementing the recommendations of the 2011 mission, and noted that the radiological risks of the Lynas plant are low because of the very low level of radioactivity of the materials handled. The team also noted that Malaysia is actively updating its regulations in accordance with the most recent IAEA safety standards.

The IAEA team gave some advice for further progress in specific areas. For example:

- The waste management plan should be based on realistic scenarios including, if considered appropriate, the identification of a final disposal site.
- Environmental monitoring activities should be optimised to ensure resources are focused on the most important areas, including enhancing monitoring of liquid discharges.
- The basis of the financial fund to be paid by Lynas for long-term waste management and decommissioning should be communicated more clearly.
- The AELB and Lynas are encouraged to maintain a proactive approach to relations with the media, public and other stakeholders, on an ongoing basis, to address continuing widespread misconceptions about the plant and radiation issues in general.

Rare earths are elements used in many high-technology applications, from mobile phones to wind turbines. Since the ore from which they are refined also usually contains naturally occurring radioactive materials such as thorium or uranium, the process results in very low-level radioactive waste that must be managed safely.

The IAEA mission's final report will be submitted to the Malaysian government at the end of October, and will be made public.