

It's Official: JAERI and JNC to Merge

On November 25, the Committee on Education, Science and Technology of the Upper House of the Japanese Diet considered and approved a bill to establish a new body called the Japan nuclear research & development institute (as an independent administrative organization). The bill subsequently passed an Upper House plenary session that took place the following day.

Those two actions make official the long-anticipated merger between the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute (JAERI) and the Japan Nuclear Cycle Development Institute (JNC) on October 1, 2005. From now on, details will be hammered out of the new institute's midterm targets, plans, organization and personnel matters (including the selection of a president).

At both the committee and plenary session, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and New Komei Party supported the bill, while the Democratic Party, Communist Party and other opposition parties voted against it. The final vote in the plenary session was 128 to 98.



The Upper House plenary session that approved the merger bill (photo by Tsuyoshi Takahashi, JAIF).

At the committee meeting, questions were raised about the following issues: (a) the significance of the integration, (b) the organization of the new institution, (c) the treatment of accumulated losses, (d) the views of the Atomic Energy Commission and Nuclear Safety Commission concerning the integration, (e) the differences in the activities of the two current entities (JAERI and JNC) and those of the new institution, (f) the relation between information disclosure and professional confidentiality, (g) policies concerning the nuclear fuel cycle and technological development, and (h) efforts to ensure safety.

The questions were posed two Diet members from the LDP, two from the Democratic Party, and one each from the New Komei and Communist parties. Opposition members asserted that the bill should be taken up only after the new long-term nuclear program is issued.

The Upper House also endorsed calls for these points:

To make the utmost effort to ensure safety.

When issuing and approving medium-term targets and plans, to consider compatibility with the new long-term nuclear program and basic policies.

To prevent the abuse of professional confidentiality.

To consider the selection of a private citizen for president.

To make all efforts to ensure an independent, creative R&D environment, promoting cooperation with universities and private companies.

With more than 4,000 employees and an annual budget of over ¥200 billion (\$1.9 billion at \$1.00=¥105), the new institution will engage in research activities ranging from basic activities to actual project stages. The continuity of those efforts is expected to stimulate research

activities further, enabling the more efficient use of the facilities and human resources of the two original organizations.

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