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A new approach to regulation

Advanced nuclear technologies have a significant role in addressing the global climate change challenge and decarbonisation efforts. But there is a pressing requirement for a change in the regulatory approach. Licensing is a key topic that would benefit from a more targeted approach. Licensing regimes are based on conventional large reactors and this means that the innovative attributes of the wide range of SMR designs are most likely to challenge the existing framework. The existing traditional nuclear licensing processes are lengthy in duration, high in cost and adopt conservative and stringent regulatory requirements. In addition, specific ownership/Licensee models may look different for SMRs, presenting a challenge for Regulators. Harmonization or Standardization may well be the ultimate goal, but until we get there we need to consider a new approach. Our proposal is that under the supervision of the IAEA (or perhaps a designated expert-led body of the IAEA), a design approval in one jurisdiction should be capable of transfer to another jurisdiction, subject to any specific points that the “adopting” Regulator wishes to examine. In practice, we are seeing a move in this direction, evidenced by an increasing number of multilateral/bilateral initiatives and numerous examples of cooperation between Regulators.

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