

## **Sewerage flows through Kakadu**

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In what could be construed as environmental vandalism, the Traditional Aboriginal Owners of Jabiru call on the government to tell them why thousands of litres of untreated supernatant sewerage liquid is being allowed to flow freely into creeks that are used regularly by the local Aboriginal community.

Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation Chairperson, Ms Nida Mangarrbar, was collecting colour and dyes for basket weaving when she noticed recent tree deaths in the area. Gundjeihmi's Mining and Environment Officer, Geoff Kyle, was notified and collected water samples from water coursing out of the Jabiru Town Council's Sewerage Land Application Area.

Water samples were taken during a period of sustained rainfall which may have diluted the samples however microbiology test results have revealed 200 *e.coli* per 100mL. Full water chemistry analyses will be available within ten days.

The Jabiru Town Council is responsible for the management of Jabiru town services, a 13km<sup>2</sup> lease area which is part of the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park; these services include sewerage and waste management.

Gundjeihmi's Executive Officer, Graham Dewar said, "The Town Council have for many years managed Jabiru's untreated effluent water via a spray irrigation system over a land application area of several hectares which is fenced off". "It's clear that this irrigation equipment has been allowed to deteriorate to a state of disrepair, with virtually all of the sprinkler heads having fallen off resulting in effluent flowing freely and causing flooding pools of raw waste water to course directly out of the Land Application Area into a nearby creek system.

Mirarr are seriously concerned about the possible impact of raw sewerage water and potential contaminating of the Baralil Creek and water ways further downstream, all areas routinely frequented for fishing, hunting and swimming by many Aboriginal people.

When GAC staff inspected the site it was also noted that apart from lots of tree deaths, there was severe weed infestation and it was painfully obvious that the area had been subjected to indiscriminate and reckless aerial weed spraying, hardly world's best practise in a National Park!

It is ironic that it is not until a Traditional Owner, in the course of her routine hunting and gathering activity, draws attention to deficiencies in the carriage of government responsibilities, or that faults are even noticed.

It is distressing for Mirarr to find, that despite constant assurances given by government authorities that the delivery of essential services within the town lease area is managed safely, it is clear that poor maintenance regimes are not only resulting in the health of Mirarr people being put at risk, but they also threaten ecosystems in the World Heritage Area.

Mirarr have been calling for many years for Jabiru to be scheduled as Aboriginal land and for them to be included in “real” joint management representation with stakeholder forums in respect to all activities impacting upon their country, particularly in regard to responsibilities performed by the Jabiru Town Council and Jabiru Town Development Authority.

Senior Mirarr Traditional Owner, Yvonne Margarula, who was appalled she when inspected the environmental damage with GAC staff said, “The mining company ERA and the NT Government are the JTDA, I hold them responsible for this. I am so angry because my mob fish, hunt and drink that water, they are ruining my country.”

Mr. Dewar added, “The Director of Parks Australia North must intervene and take charge of the situation, after all it is PAN who manage the World Heritage Area on behalf of Traditional Aboriginal Owners and has subleased the town area to the NT Government to operate as a mining town.”

The Jabiru town area lease was excised out of the Kakadu Aboriginal land claim in the mid 70’s at the inception of Ranger mining developments and the establishing of Kakadu National Park and it still remains the case today that recognition of Mirarr rights, responsibilities and obligations in caring for their country are not formally recognised by government.

Mr Dewar said, “Surely any fair minded person can appreciate that there is absolutely nothing unreasonable about Mirarr expectations to jointly manage the town in a “jointly” managed National Park, a recognised World Heritage Area, listed as such because of the intrinsic environmental and Indigenous Cultural qualities.”

Gundjeihmi are calling for a full and transparent investigation into all aspects of the Jabiru sewerage operations and the impacts on the surrounding environment, all of which is part of the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park

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