

GUNDJEIHMI

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



Media Statement – 9 February 2011

Ranger shutdown reveals unfeasibility of expansion – Mirarr call for independent surface water study

The recent shutdown of milling facilities at the Ranger Uranium Mine at Kakadu National Park has confirmed the impossibility of the proposed expansion of the mine under current conditions, according to the Mirarr traditional Aboriginal owners of the site. The comments follow the recent announcement by ERA that it has shutdown milling for three months due to water management problems.

The Ranger mine operates just kilometres upstream of the Aboriginal community of Madjinbardi and World Heritage-listed wetlands. For over a decade the Mirarr have persistently argued for an overhaul to its environmental performance, particularly water management. An environmental impact statement on the proposed expansion of the mine, involving the use of acid leaching of uranium, an increase in the capacity of the tailings dam to six metres above its original design height, and a separate proposal to conduct underground mining, are due this year.

“ERA has made many mistakes at Ranger. They haven’t really listened to us and now they have all this trouble with water. They can’t look after Ranger now. We don’t believe they can look after the mine if they make it bigger,” said Mirarr Senior Traditional Owner, Yvonne Margarula. “We are worried, always worried,” Ms Margarula added.

Examples of Ranger’s poor environmental performance in recent years include structural problems with the current operating pit; seepage from the previous pit; an increasing inventory of contaminated process water that is now of the order of 10 million litres; contamination of drinking water and showers causing injury to workers; and persistent and unquantified seepage from the tailings dam.

Executive officer of the Gundjeihmi Corporation, Justin O’Brien, said the situation has resulted in increasing concern among Mirarr that country is being contaminated, food supplies compromised, water polluted, and the timeline for mine rehabilitation stretched.

“The Gundjeihmi Corporation is particularly concerned that ERA, given these current problems at Ranger, has little prospect of being able to appropriately manage the greatly-expanded facilities that it envisages in the near future,” Mr O’Brien said.

Accordingly, the Corporation has called for ERA to implement the recommendations made by the 2003 Senate Inquiry into Environmental Management of Uranium Mines by including the current real time monitoring equipment into the statutory monitoring regime and to instigate an independent review of surface water management at the mine site. At the Corporation’s request an independent review was conducted last year into groundwater management at Ranger. That process should now be duplicated for surface waters.

“We’re now calling on ERA, as an important first step, to duplicate the process adopted last year regarding groundwater and to commission an expert independent study into surface water management. We need this demonstration of good faith from the company at this critical juncture,” Mr O’Brien concluded.