

GUNDJEIHMI

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



Media Statement – 10 February 2011

Mirarr welcome ERA commitment to independent surface water study

The Mirarr traditional Aboriginal owners of the site of the Ranger Uranium Mine have today welcomed the agreement by miner Energy Resources of Australia to commission an independent expert review into surface water management at the mine site.

Mirarr senior traditional owner, Yvonne Margarula, congratulated ERA for its immediate acceptance of the need for the independent review.

"I am happy that the mining company is acting on what we want. We are worried about living with poisoned water and we are worried the mine can't be rehabilitated properly. We have a good chance now to fix the problems with someone expert outside the mining company and the government," Ms Margarula said.

In response to Ranger's increasing water management problems and last week's shutdown of the milling facility for three months, the Gundjeihmi Corporation yesterday called on ERA to commission the expert review. Last year the Corporation and mining company jointly facilitated an independent expert review of groundwater issues at Ranger, with the detailed review and its early implementation showing the benefit of a cooperative relationship.

The Corporation today reiterated its call that ERA also move to implement the recommendations of the 2003 Senate inquiry into the environmental regulation of uranium mining. These included the establishment of event-based monitoring of Ranger's surface water runoff and the incorporation of that monitoring into the legal monitoring system at the mine.

The executive officer of the Gundjeihmi Corporation, Justin O'Brien, commended the mining company for heeding the traditional owners' call for an independent review and reminded the company of its broader obligations.

"We welcome ERA's acknowledgment of the need for this independent assessment of the surface water runoff at Ranger – it's a timely and important step ahead of the company's imminent expansion proposals. There remains, however, undone business with respect to the recommendations of the 2003 Senate inquiry and we're asking ERA to consider the practical steps to give meaningful effect to those recommendations," Mr O'Brien said.

(A summary of key recommendations of the 2003 Senate inquiry follows.)

Further information: Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation on 08 8979 2200 / 0427 008 765

Key recommendations of the 2003 Senate Inquiry into the Environmental Regulation of Uranium Mining

Recommendation 1

The Committee strongly supports the Mirrar in their wish to actively participate in their land's management and protection and recommends that they be given a position on the Minesite Technical Committee.

Recommendation 6

The Committee holds the view that contaminants from these mine sites must be measured accurately and kept within broadly accepted limits whether adverse effects are demonstrated or not. Accordingly it recommends:

- a. An increase in the number of monitoring sites and compliance points, especially along critical drainage features such as Gulungul, Corridor and Georgetown Creeks and Coonjimba and Djalkmarra Billabongs to allow ongoing analysis and checks on sources of contaminants, loads, dilution, reactions and uptake by the ecosystem, and therefore possible impacts.
- b. The adoption of broad event-based monitoring to ensure all necessary water management system components are compliant with limits set.
- c. More rigorous horizontal and vertical monitoring and reporting of all groundwater units around tailings facilities
- d. Increased check soil monitoring programs by SSD and DBIRD, more sampling points located in areas of active water treatment and more field studies to quantify the long-term containment retention characteristics of soils.

Recommendation 8

In relation to water quality management, the Committee recommends that:

- a. the re-incorporation of load limits into water quality criteria which are no more than twice the average natural loads in a system (preferably lower)
- b. the limit for uranium at gauging station 8210009 in Magela Creek lowered from 5.8 µg/L to 0.5 µg/L
- c. a separate system of trigger levels at important discharge sites such as Corridor Creek, RP1 and Gulungul Creek
- d. the trigger system for water quality to be expanded to include other contaminants from Ranger such as NO₃, PO₄, Cu, Pb, Zn, radium Al, Mn, P and Re,
- e. The trigger levels for NO₃ should be re-assessed, including the addition of NH₄ trigger levels, utilising a data set which includes sufficiently low detection limits and the effects of blast residues leaching removed to provide concentrations more closely representative of natural NO₃ and NH₄ in Swift Creek.
- f. the trigger system to include the loads of contaminants as well as concentrations
- g. Greater emphasis be placed on collecting hydrology data for joint interpretation with water quality data.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that groundwater should be better protected by:

- a. more groundwater bores to allow the checking and analysis of groundwater quality
- b. the conduct of more detailed field studies aimed at quantifying groundwater flow paths to enable more accurate short and long term modelling.
- c. greater emphasis on identifying potentially permeable rock units, especially carbonate features as identified by Haylen (1981);
- d. more rigorous monitoring and reporting of different components of groundwater, both vertically and horizontally.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends:

- a. the incorporation of maximum cumulative load limits into specific areas for disposal, specific to the use of irrigation or wetlands,
- b. more rigorous sampling under the requirements of Authorisation 82/3 and the ERs of wetland and irrigation areas including more sites and frequencies
- c. detailed studies and analyses to be prepared of the capacity of wetland filters to retain uranium and other contaminants (including Mg, SO₄, Mn, U, 226Ra, etc.), the ultimate fate of those contaminants and the long-term cumulative impacts on plants and animals within the wetlands until rehabilitation.

Recommendation 15

- a. the Committee can see no legitimate argument for reports to be withheld from public scrutiny and calls for them to be released without delay.