



Uranium spill report draws local ire

TRADITIONAL Owners have criticised a government report into last year's spill at the Ranger uranium mine near Kakadu National Park, warning a review of regulations at the site was "critical".

Last December a leach tank at the Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) mine failed, spilling 1400 cubic metres of acidic slurry and forcing a six-month shutdown of the processing plant.

The incident prompted a joint investigation by the Northern Territory and Federal governments into the cause of the incident and the regulatory response.

A final report into the leach tank failure, released last month by Federal Industry minister Ian Macfarlane and NT Mines and Energy minister Willem Westra van Holthe, found ERA's leach tank monitoring plan was technically sound but possibly not sustainable. The mine's restart was going well and should be allowed to continue, according to the report.

It recommended ERA develop documented processes to ensure leaks were thoroughly dealt with, and advised regulators to develop their skills around process safety.

The NT and Federal governments accepted most of the recommendations, however only "noted" the report's call for a review of the regulatory framework to ensure a more "comprehensive and clear" regulatory environment.

Mr Macfarlane said regulators would monitor ERA's progress towards improved process safety on a quarterly basis for two years.

"It is critical that ERA improves process safety practices at Ranger to ensure mining activities continue to have no impact on Kakadu National Park," he said.

However, Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation chief executive Justin O'Brien said his organisation was not informed of the intention to release the report, despite being involved in the investigating taskforce as representatives of the Mirrar Traditional Owners of the site and being thanked in the ministers' joint statement.

Mr O'Brien slammed the decision not to

review regulations around the mine.

"We are bitterly disappointed that the investigation taskforce process has broken down, not for any want of trying on our part," he said.

"It is critical that the recommendations of this report are fully implemented with highest priority given to a comprehensive review of the regulatory framework at Ranger, a point which the ministers have acknowledged but up to this point have not committed to act on.

"The tank collapse which sent over a million litres of radioactive acid spilling across the mine site...For Traditional Owners to have any confidence in the capacity of ERA and the regulators to manage this mine the recommendations of this report must be acted on swiftly and completely."

Mr Westra van Holthe said that the incident caused no offsite environmental impacts and that the report will assist ERA in improving their practices.

"ERA must ensure day-to-day safety on site; the protection of workers and the environment is paramount," he said.