

Transcript

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Compere: **KATE O'TOOLE** Summary ID: **W00042650589**
Item: **REPORT ON NUCLEAR WASTE LEGISLATION.**

INTERVIEWEES: JUSTIN O'BRIEN, GUNDJEIHM ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Audience:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people
	2800	2400	5200

KATE O'TOOLE: It's looking more and more likely that the Northern Territory will house Australia's first nuclear waste dump, after legislation for a dump was passed in the Lower House yesterday.

But if we look back to the beginning of the uranium cycle, it's also the Northern Territory that provides uranium for nuclear power stations around the world, and that uranium comes from the Ranger Mine in Jabiru.

ERA was due to wrap up operations at Ranger by the end of this year, but instead they've applied to expand their operations, and the local traditional owners are concerned that environmental problems will befall their land if the expansions are approved.

Tomorrow they'll be talking to a delegation of European Parliamentarians about their concerns, and Justin O'Brien is the executive officer of the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, who's leading the delegation.



Justin, I think I stumbled over that, I'm sorry about that. Could you please give me a bit of a pronunciation lesson?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, Kate, you did very well, it's Gund-jake-mi.

KATE O'TOOLE: Yeah, okay, Gund-jake-mi, excellent. Now, why are you meeting with these European Parliamentarians, what do they have as an interest in uranium mining at Jabiru?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I'll answer that, but I just need to clarify something from your introduction there. The Ranger uranium mine is set to end mining in 2021, and then there's a period of five years rehabilitation, until 2026.

The mining and deposition of tailings into pit number three is set to end in the next year or so, what they've actually put on the agenda, and this was discussed in Senate Estimates this week, was a draft Environmental Impact Statement for the expansion.

So it's not as if they're coming to a close at this point, but they're seeking to mine in alternative ways, and to expand their operations over the next few years. And that's what's got us concerned.

KATE O'TOOLE: I do apologise for that, and thank you for the clarification there, so a change in tailings?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

A change in the mining methodology, introducing some acid leach technology there, and as well we expect imminent is the application for underground mining as well.

Now in response to your question, what we're interested in making the European Parliamentarians aware of is that uranium does not just land at Rotterdam as if from the sky. Internationally, 70 per cent of the world's uranium is derived from mining on indigenous peoples' land, whether it's in Africa, North America, India or Australia. As you've said, a good proportion of that comes from here, and that's 10 per cent of the world's uranium used in nuclear facilities, is derived from the Ranger uranium mine.

Now our simple message to them is there is a cost at the front end of the nuclear fuel cycle that you need to consider in all your deliberations about nuclear energy, and the cost is in human rights, social impact and environmental problems for indigenous communities.

KATE O'TOOLE:

This is something that you don't think they've considered to this point?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

It's amazing, when you have this dialogue with people overseas, including people from France, where 75 per cent of the electricity is derived from nuclear energy, that they don't - that they have such little knowledge of the origins of the uranium, and of course, people in say places like Germany, where



there is no longer any uranium mining, are fully aware of the consequences of that mining.

Now this is a radioactive mineral that remains dangerous to human health for several hundred thousand years, and the radiation component of it is deeply troubling to European nations, that since the end of Communism, have ceased mining, and yet the Germans themselves have, you know, recently agreed to prolong the use of nuclear facilities in their country, no doubt using uranium mines from somewhere else.

So we'd like, you know, people in Germany, and people in Europe to know, whilst you may not be happy with it happening in Europe, that is the mining, you enjoy your electricity by virtue of the adverse impact that this is having on indigenous people elsewhere.

KATE O'TOOLE:

When you say adverse impacts, talk us through the expansion plans, as you understand them, and why the Mirrar people are opposed to them, what adverse impacts you see as a potential outcome.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

Could I just say, Kate, first of all there's quite an echo, I don't know whether it's my phone or a speaker in the studio that's echoing back through your mic onto me, I can hear my - there's an echo of everything I say, but I'll go on.



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We only - that's fixed it - only this week have we discovered that the Government has received an advance copy of the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Ranger heat leach proposal, that's the proposal to thrust an acid heat leach facility to use acid to extract the uranium, allowing them to extract uranium from lower and lower grades of uranium at cheaper and cheaper cost to the company.

Now that EIS has to be considered, you know, properly and in due course it goes out formally for public comment. We are not at this point saying that we are opposed, we are saying that we have grave concerns, and those concerns are exacerbated by the company's troubles that they're experiencing this wet season.

KATE O'TOOLE:

Now can you tell us a little bit more about those, because we've heard that Ranger recently shut down their processing operations because of heavy rain, do you know how the tailings dam is looking, for example, as a result of this latest rain and flooding?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

I think it's safe to say that the recent rains and flooding have stretched the Ranger operation almost to its limit, they have contingency plans that are being actively considered, things that they'd rather not be considering, that would delay mining.

You're looking at a facility now that has, because of the threat to the environment, because of its

management of water, has ceased milling, as you said, for three months, and that comes at a cost to the company of course, and in turn, at a cost to the traditional owners, in terms of lost royalties.

But what are we looking at? We're looking at over 10 million litres of contaminated water, radioactively contaminated water, and a host, you know, a chemical cocktail of contaminants in this water, sitting on that Ranger project area, in the middle of Australia's largest national park, in a monsoonal environment, where it rains...

KATE O'TOOLE: Sorry, just to be clear, are you concerned that that water has escaped, and that the flooding has resulted in any breaches of that dam?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: There's been no breach of the dam, we don't hold any concerns over any breach of the dam, to talk about that would be irresponsible, given the nature of this chemical, and the fact that there are people living downstream of the mine...

KATE O'TOOLE: Yes, I just wanted to be clear, yep.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: In fact that's a good opportunity to be clear that there is no - there is no threat to human safety that we're aware of right now, because of these rains. But it has pushed the mine's management of water right to the limit, and there are things happening right now, discussions with Government regulators, as to how they can better manage that.



Now we, as I said, we want them to mine well, we use the royalty, we are harnessing the royalty for social economic advancement of Aboriginal people across that region, we're working with the Federal Government to do it, we also need to protect the environment, we need to protect those Aboriginal communities living downstream of the mine, and it's just a shame that it's taken a decade of lobbying, internationally, nationally, media work, angry meetings, press releases, for them to finally in only recent times, actively engage with us on our environmental concerns.

And with respect to water management, it's just too late...

KATE O'TOOLE: Alright, we have to leave it there, we have time constraints unfortunately, we thank you so much for speaking with us today, Justin.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No worries, thanks a lot.

KATE O'TOOLE: Justin O'Brien is the executive officer of the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, we've been speaking about the situation there as a result of the Ranger Mine in Jabiru, and the Aboriginal Corporation will be meeting with the European delegation tomorrow, they'll have one hour to sit down with this European delegation that's in the country, and talk about their concerns.



We might try to catch up with the ERA over the next couple of days as well, to hear their perspective on this.

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ABs = Managers, administrators, professions. GBs = Grocery buyers.
