

Media Release

Ranger Leak Gives Lie To Government Claim

Sham Enquiries Won't Uncover Nuclear Secrecy

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Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, representing the Mirrar people of Kakadu, has today condemned the Commonwealth Government's monitoring program at Energy Resources of Australia's Ranger uranium mine as farcical. The accusation comes after news of a leak at the mine and a subsequent month-long cover-up by the company.

The Mirrar are traditional owners of the Ranger and Jabiluka mineral lease areas, both totally surrounded by the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park.

Speaking from New York, where she is addressing an NGO forum at the United Nations Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, Gundjehmi's Executive Officer, Jacqui Katona, said the Commonwealth's monitoring program at Ranger is totally inadequate.

"This leak and subsequent cover-up gives the lie to Australian Government's claim that Ranger is the most monitored mine in the world. It also reveals the total inadequacy and partiality of the Commonwealth's Office of the Supervising Scientist (OSS), tasked with monitoring the mine.

"The Supervising Scientist is simply not doing its job if such a serious accident can occur and be kept under wraps for a month. The Mirrar find it offensive that they were informed of this leak of manganese via a statement to the Stock Exchange," Ms Katona said.

Yesterday ERA announced to the ASX that contaminated water with elevated levels of manganese had leaked into Ranger's constructed wetlands filter area over one month ago.

Ms Katona also roundly condemned the announcement by Northern Territory Resource Development Minister, Daryl Manzie, that his department would conduct an inquiry in the manganese leak.

"This inquiry will simply white-wash the accident. We have absolutely no faith in an inquiry conducted by the mining company and its biggest supporter, the Northern Territory Government," she said.

Ms Katona stressed that the ongoing poor environmental management at Ranger and the inadequacy of OSS monitoring does not bode well for ERA's current proposal to mine Jabiluka.

“The Mirrar simply cannot accept Senator Robert Hill's promises that Jabiluka will not ruin their traditional country. The Australian Government cannot yet satisfy the World Heritage Committee and the international scientific community that Jabiluka will not spoil the cultural and natural values of Kakadu.

A discussion on Kakadu and the impacts of ERA's Jabiluka mine proposal will occur at the 24th Session of the Bureau in Paris from June 26. Kakadu will also be discussed when Australia hosts the World Heritage Committee meeting in Cairns in December this year. Ms Katona said she would write to the World Heritage Centre informing them of the accident.

Leakage of radioactive and highly contaminated tailings water was covered up by ERA for a month before reporting it to the OSS. This is a serious breach of their safety obligations with respect to the Ranger Mine.