

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

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Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Science
Programme: Science
Topic: Minesite Technical Committee
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Question Type: Spoken

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: Because time is a little short, could you put to us on notice your expected timeline for when the various components would be set down and either made public or at least put to the MTC.

Mr McAllister: I can take that on notice, yes.

Senator LUDLAM: Even explaining, as you have done there, the order in which it rolls out?

Mr McAllister: I think if I can explain it, on notice, that is probably the best way, because it is a bit of a fluid thing, depending on ERA's current priorities in terms of closure?

Answer:

Under current regulatory arrangements, mining at Ranger Uranium Mine will cease in 2021, with rehabilitation and closure of the site required by 2026. As part of the closure process, a number of closure criteria are being developed that Energy Resources of Australia Ltd, as the mine operator, will need to meet, or demonstrate will be met, by a defined point in time, in order to relinquish its responsibilities for the site.

Energy Resources of Australia Ltd is responsible for the development of the closure criteria which will require final approval by the Northern Territory regulatory authority. The Supervising Scientist is providing technical advice to both Energy Resources of Australia and the Northern Territory Department of Mines and Energy in the development of the closure criteria to ensure that they are based on the best available science and provide for the ongoing protection of the surrounding environment.

The closure criteria are being developed in consultation with the Ranger Minesite Technical Committee; comprising the Supervising Scientist, Energy Resources of Australia Ltd, the Northern Territory Department of Mines and Energy, the Northern Land Council and the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation. There is no statutory timeframe for the development of the closure criteria, but certain criteria will be required sooner to inform the mine closure engineering designs. Surface water criteria are the current priority and it is expected these will be finalised during 2015.

The timeframe for criteria development is not within direct control of the Supervising Scientist and depends in large part on the resources made available to the process by Energy Resources of Australia Ltd. The issue of public release of closure criteria has not been discussed. The Supervising Scientist will raise this issue at the next meeting of the Minesite Technical Committee.