



**Phillip Evans**

**From:** Phillip Evans [langleyevans@bigpond.com]

**Sent:** Monday, 29 July 2002 11:16 AM

**To:** ecita.sen.@aph.gov.au

**Subject:** "Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Environmental Regulation of Uranium Mining."

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Secretary, Senate ECITA References Committee, Parliament House, CANBERRA ACT 2600.

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### **LEAKS, SPILLS AND MIS-MANAGEMENT**

Australia has had a long involvement in the nuclear industry and despite falling uranium prices and rising environmental impacts, continues to actively support and promote the industry. The Federal Government has pushed for uranium mining adjacent to world heritage areas, approved controversial mining techniques (ISL) and turned a blind eye to environmental and indigenous rights.

Environmental standards have been driven down and public accountability denied at both the Honeymoon and Beverley acid in situ leach (ISL) mines in northern South Australia. Acid ISL involves the injection of sulphuric acid into groundwater to dissolve underground uranium. The mining solution is pumped to the surface, the uranium extracted and then all the liquids and mine wastes are dumped back into the underground aquifers.

As well as polluting groundwater by impacts of mining and of waste discharge, ISL uranium mining has serious problems with surface leaks and spills. The Beverley mine has had four significant leaks this year alone. Owned by General Atomics (USA) it is the only commercial uranium mine in the Western world to use the controversial acid ISL method. At Honeymoon a commercial mine plant has not yet been constructed by Southern Cross Resources (Canada).

Leaks and environmental breaches have also beset the Ranger uranium mine in Kakadu (operated by ERA). In April 2002, a former employee of the mine detailed allegations of major environmental breaches. One of the incidents described, found uranium levels up to 70 times higher in Kakadu National Park than the reporting standard.

Over 110 environmental breaches have been documented at the Ranger uranium mine.

#### **At Beverley and at Honeymoon ISL mines**

- The Federal and South Australian Governments to commit to protection of groundwater – including no discharge of mine waste to groundwater, to prohibit underground leaks into connected aquifers and to require rehabilitation of mining impacts on groundwater.
- The Inquiry to recommend increased monitoring of operations and public reporting of all radioactive leaks
- The Inquiry to recommend a new public environmental assessment of the management of mine wastes

#### **At Kakadu mines**

- The Federal and NT Governments to facilitate the rehabilitation, lease relinquishment and incorporation of the Jabiluka and Koongarra mineral leases into Kakadu National Park.
- Rio Tinto and relevant government agencies to support a phase out, exit and rehabilitation strategy for Ranger, including aiding the establishment of a viable Aboriginal economy independent of mining.

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- The Inquiry to articulate a credible action plan to prevent the development, rehabilitate the impacts and incorporate the mineral lease of the Jabiluka site , in order to protect the region's World Heritage property and values.

The Federal and NT Governments to act to reduce environmental impacts of operations at Ranger, and for monitoring, reporting and regulatory regimes be strengthened to include more event based monitoring, increased monitoring scope and trigger points, and enhanced reporting.

That the *Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee* inquire into and report on the regulatory, monitoring and reporting regimes that govern environmental performance at the Ranger and Jabiluka uranium operations in the Northern Territory and the Beverley and Honeymoon ISL operations in South Australia, with particular reference to:

- The adequacy, effectiveness and performance of existing monitoring and reporting regimes and regulations;
- The adequacy and effectiveness of those Commonwealth agencies responsible for the oversight and implementation of these regimes and

A review of Commonwealth responsibilities and mechanisms to realise improved environmental performance and transparency of reporting.

Regards Phillip Evans.

