Mirarr Perspectives on Mining and Rehabilitation at Ranger

15 May 2007
“In the end, we form the conclusion that their opposition shall not be allowed to prevail.”

Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry (1977) (pp. 9)
Presentation Overview

- Aboriginal ‘World View’
- Origins of Ranger Uranium Mine
  - Land Rights v Uranium v Kakadu v …
- Brief Historical Overture of Ranger
- The Relevance of Jabiluka
- Finding Common Ground: Ranger Rehab
- Current Status of Ranger (Mirarr/GAC View)
- Towards a Shared Post-Mining Landscape?
- Summary & Conclusion
Who Are the Mirarr-Gundjeihmi?

- The Mirarr-Gundjeihmi are the traditional owners of country which includes the Ranger, Jabiluka, Jabiru township and adjacent Kakadu National Park.
- Their claim to this country is long and firmly established both by Bininj tradition as well as ‘white-fella’ law (eg. land rights).
- Mirarr is the clan group while Gundjeihmi is the language group.
Aboriginal ‘World View’

- Taking care of country is a serious traditional responsibility
- Involves maintenance, including seasonal burning, protection of sacred and/or “dangerous” places
- **Country is integral to cultural identity**
Origins of Ranger Uranium Mine

- First indications of Ranger were Oct 1969 …
- Major field work in 1970 proved a large, viable uranium project: Jabiluka, Koongarra and Nabarlek later discovered
- This time also coincided with increasing public debate about land rights, nuclear issues (ie. uranium) and a proposed national park in the same region …
- **Strong government support for mining but**:
  - Env Impact Ass’t, Woodward & Ranger Inquiries
Brief Historical Overture of Ranger

• Throughout the 1970’s, there was vociferous debate about Ranger:
  – Woodward Inquiry a ‘veto on mining’ was primal for land rights
  – Whitlam Government bought 50% of Ranger, legal agreements
  – Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry – recognised persistent, clear Mirarr opposition but this was ‘not allowed to prevail’

• Ranger was given final legal approvals in Jan. 1979, first production in Aug. 1981
• Gagadju Association established (royalties)
• Mirarr formed Gundjeihmi Abor Corp in 1995
The Relevance of Jabiluka

- Jabiluka is highly relevant to the debate about Ranger (in many ways)
- Jabiluka is an integral part of Mirarr country
- In 1996, a revised Jabiluka project was proposed by ERA / North Ltd
- Due to ongoing concerns over the extent of impacts from Ranger, Mirarr opposed Jabiluka and worked hard to prevent the then development – joined by many allies
- In 2000, Rio Tinto took over North Ltd ...
Finding Common Ground : Ranger Rehab

- Despite the adversarial Jabiluka campaigns waged by Mirarr-GAC and North/ERA, the fact remained the same:

  Ranger would eventually need rehabilitation

- From 2000 Rio Tinto adopted a different approach and listened: GAC took stock

- Result: Jabiluka was placed on ‘LTCM’

- ERA regularly involve GAC and consultants over issues for Ranger (& Jabiluka)

- Co-operation and understanding improved …
Current Status of Ranger (Mirarr/GAC View)

• Long history of environmental ‘incidents’
  – 2000 Tailings Water Leak; 2002 Incidents; the (infamous) 2004 Process-Drinking Water incident; 2007 flood; etc.

• In the early 2000’s, Ranger was expected to finished production by about 2011 or so

• In recent years, given the uranium price, ERA have continually revised and changed their mining-milling plan for Ranger

• Present plans extend milling to ~2020 and:
  – milling of lower grade stockpiles, expected larger Pit #3, possible underground mining of Ranger #3, etc …
Towards a Shared Post-Mining Landscape?

- Over recent years, Mirrar-GAC have invested heavily in people and resources to facilitate input Ranger (op’s & rehab)
- Considerable goodwill was being established to address various issues
- Current Senior Mirarr had expected to be able to walk a rehabilitated Ranger country with their children: this is now most unlikely and is corrupting goodwill to address rehabilitation issues
Summary & Conclusions

• Despite clear differences in world views, both Mirarr-GAC, ERA & others have shared interests in the successful rehabilitation of the Ranger Project Area (& associated issues)

• We can’t meaningfully engage on merging these cultural, scientific, regulatory and corporate needs due to the ever-changing production plan for Ranger

• There is hope and goodwill for the future on both sides but this is being tested …
“None of the promises last, but the problems always do.”

Yvonne Margarula, Senior Traditional Owner