

6 COMMUNICATION AND LIAISON

6.1 Introduction

An effective programme of communication and liaison is a key element of the work of the Supervising Scientist Division. Of particular importance is the need to inform the Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people living in the Alligator Rivers Region about the supervisory activities of the Office of the Supervising Scientist and the results of the research and monitoring programmes undertaken or managed by *eriss*. The Division also seeks to communicate effectively with research partners and stakeholders within government, industry, science and the general community. As part of the Department of the Environment and Heritage and as a research institute, the Division contributes substantially to the development of national and international policy and programmes on environmental radiation and nuclear issues and tropical wetlands conservation.

6.2 Research support and communication

During 2003–04 the *eriss* Research Support and Communication programme continued to provide policy support, in particular coordination of internal communication and general workplanning, across the research and monitoring programmes.

The programme has also supported a range of ongoing and event-based communication activities. These activities emphasise and develop our interaction with the local Aboriginal community, scientific and research organisations, non-governmental environmental groups and the general public.

6.2.1 Indigenous employment and consultation

Employment of Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people in *eriss* research and monitoring programmes continues to be an important part of our programme and has helped to maintain positive working relationships with local people. This has a two-way learning outcome: Aboriginal people obtain first-hand knowledge, including valuable technical skills, and understanding of our research and monitoring programmes; and opportunities for *eriss* staff to work alongside landowners ‘on country’ and gain greater insights into traditional culture and values. This aspect continues to develop well, and we have been able to employ a greater range of local Aboriginal people.

Over the year, *eriss* worked alongside Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people throughout the Alligator Rivers Region on projects at Ranger, Jabiluka and Nabarlek; on rehabilitation research in the Gunlom area in the south of Kakadu National Park; and on weed and fire management at Boggy Plain on the South Alligator River floodplain in the north of Kakadu National Park. These projects involved sampling of wetlands vegetation, bush tucker, fish, macroinvertebrates, air and water quality testing, and assessment of fire patterns. Monitoring in the escarpment area of the Park to gather baseline data on

invertebrate species, including endemic isopod species, included a high level of indigenous involvement.

The Mirarr people, the Traditional Owners of the Ranger and Jabiluka leases, became involved in research and monitoring projects related to the Jabiluka mine for the first time. This decision reflects the level of mutual trust built between Supervising Scientist and the Mirarr and the change in the local political environment due to the long-term care and maintenance agreement which came into place between ERA and Traditional Owners for the Jabiluka lease area.

The Supervising Scientist Division has maintained a high level of informal contact with communities within Kakadu National Park and encouraged positive engagement, especially through employment opportunities. The Division also seeks to develop and maintain relationships with the Mirarr people and keep communication channels open. Ongoing liaison and cooperative activities with staff from Parks Australia North also occurs.

Staff from this programme also coordinate consultation with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal associations, the Northern Land Council and Parks Australia North in support of research projects within Kakadu National Park and Arnhem land. A meeting was held with the West Arnhem Regional Council of the Northern Land Council to inform members of our research and monitoring work, in particular issues associated with Ranger and Jabiluka. The Supervising Scientist and staff of the Division attended Kakadu Board of Management meetings during the year to keep Board members informed about issues associated with the Ranger and Jabiluka mines, particularly the Ranger water contamination incident.

6.2.2 Ranger water contamination incident

During and after the Ranger mine water contamination incident, the Supervising Scientist and staff had numerous meetings with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal Associations and the Kakadu Board of Management, and held a public meeting in Jabiru, to discuss the incident and the subsequent investigation into worker health and environmental issues.

Keeping local people informed was a priority for the Supervising Scientist in the weeks after the incident, and considerable time was spent ensuring that the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation and other groups in the Alligator Rivers Region were well informed about the investigation and findings.

Media interest in the incident was also high, attracting substantial local, national and international coverage. The Supervising Scientist conducted media conferences and many interviews with print and electronic media, and issued media statements on a regular basis. Media statements are available at <http://www.deh.gov.au/ssd/new/index.html>.

6.2.3 Other communication activities

Coordination of other communication and general public relations activities continued throughout the year. This includes participation in community events and festivals, attendance at relevant community committee meetings and providing tours of the Supervising Scientist facilities for visiting scientists and dignitaries, school students,

environmental groups and other interested people. The programme also facilitates cross-cultural training for staff within the Supervising Scientist Division.

Event-oriented communication activities included involvement in the Kunballanjajna (previously Gunbalanya) Open Day in Arnhem Land, three Alligator Rivers Region school-based science events, a number of visits to Nabarlek mine with Traditional Owners, involvement in the Parks Australia North Ranger Training Workshop, and a Nabarlek research information day held in Kunballanjajna.

New links have been built and existing ones strengthened with research partners and other groups and networks and to promote the work of *eriss* and Supervising Scientist within the scientific community.

Future development of Research Support and Communication within the Division will focus on identifying ways to enhance our reporting of information to Traditional Owners and the indigenous communities within the Alligator Rivers Region.

Operation of the National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research (*ncwtr*) is supported through the provision of a secretariat and assistance in the development and implementation of communication and extension activities. These activities are further described in Section 5 of this Annual Report.

6.3 National and international environmental protection issues

6.3.1 Environmental radiation protection

The Supervising Scientist Division was involved in several activities as a result of the ‘Third International Symposium on the Protection of the Environment from Ionising Radiation (SPEIR 3)’ that was held in Darwin in July 2002. The Supervising Scientist, Dr Arthur Johnston, attended and presented a paper at a meeting of experts organised by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Stockholm, Sweden, in October 2003 on the topic of environmental radiation protection. Dr Johnston subsequently attended a follow-up conference in Stockholm in May 2004.

6.3.2 Basslink

In September 2003, Dr Chris Humphrey and Dr Ken Evans of *eriss* were appointed to represent the Australian Government on the Gordon River Scientific Reference Committee, to consider a range of scientific and technical issues associated with the implementation of the Gordon River Basslink Monitoring Program and other Gordon River Basslink scientific reports.

The Basslink proposal involves connecting Tasmania’s electricity grid with the mainland grid. It was assessed and approved under the *Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974*, and one of the conditions of approval required that this committee be established.

The Committee held its first meeting on Hobart on 24 February 2004.

6.3.3 Minerals Council of Australia

Staff from the Supervising Scientist Division assisted the Minerals Council of Australia with its 'Value through sustainable development 03' conference held in Brisbane in November 2003. This included running the 'Assuring Sustainability' workshop on 14 November 2003.

6.4 Contributions to wetlands conservation

The scientific and policy expertise that has been developed within *eriss* places the Division in an excellent position to make a valuable contribution to wetland conservation issues at a local, national and international level.

6.4.1 Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel

Dr Max Finlayson is Chair of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) after being accepted as the Oceania Delegate following nomination by the Department of the Environment and Heritage. The Panel did not hold a formal meeting in 2003–04, but has pursued by e-mail correspondence a workplan agreed at the previous meeting and will hold formal mid-term workshops in 2004–05 to produce material for submission to the next Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

Dr Rick van Dam of *eriss* was nominated by the Department of the Environment and Heritage as the Australian National Focal Point for the Panel in recognition of his personal and *eriss*'s wider expertise in wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring. In this capacity, Dr van Dam participates in the NRMCC Wetlands and Waterbirds Taskforce.

6.4.2 Wetlands International Board of Directors

As President of the Wetlands International Board of Directors, Dr Max Finlayson has participated in two meetings of the Board and led the search for a new Chief Executive Officer for the organisation.

Board meetings have concentrated on organisational issues and the development of a new programme base. The new Wetlands International programme base has many links to the *eriss* research agenda, and in past years significant joint projects have been undertaken. Project links have most recently been directed towards joint development of a wetland training concept that will build on past training initiatives in Australia and be extended to overseas locations.

Dr Finlayson, through Wetlands International, was also involved in the Southern Gulf Birds and Wetlands Forum (organised by the World Wide Fund for Nature – WWF) held in Karumba, Queensland, in May 2004.

Dr Peter Bayliss has continued as coordinator of the Wetlands International specialist group on wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring; this group has been the vehicle for much past collaboration between *eriss* and Wetlands International with a recent focus on developing an internationally relevant programme on remote sensing of change in wetlands.

6.4.3 Other activities

Work by *eriss* on a range of other wetland conservation programmes and issues continued during 2003–04.

Society of Wetland Scientists (Australia)

Dr Max Finlayson is Vice-President of the Society of Wetland Scientists (Australia) with all input being undertaken by e-mail and teleconferences.

The Society is planning an international wetland meeting in Cairns in 2006.

World Wide Fund for Nature – Science Advisory Committee

The Committee was established to provide advice on the science that supports WWF programmes. The meeting, held in Sydney 2003, focused on assessing WWF themes of marine, land and inland waters, and identified priorities and key issues as part of a strategic planning process to develop a five-year conservation strategy. In 2004, Dr Max Finlayson was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Committee of WWF-Australia in recognition of his experience in tropical Australia and expertise in wetland research and management.

Australian Society of Limnology

The ASL 2003 medal was awarded to Dr Max Finlayson for his world-wide promotion of Australian limnology and wetland management; an impressive contribution to limnological scientific research; and excellence in education and communication. The Medal was presented to Dr Finlayson by Associate Professor Andrew Boulton at the 42nd annual Australian Society of Limnology conference held in Warrnambool on 1–5 December 2003. In accepting the award Dr Finlayson made a formal presentation on ‘Building a scientific base for maintaining the ecological character of wetlands: an example from Northern Australia’.

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

Dr Max Finlayson has also taken a lead authorship role in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment with specific input to the chapter dealing with the condition and trends of ecosystem services and the biodiversity of inland waters. He has further been contracted to coordinate a synthesis report derived from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment for the Ramsar Convention on wetlands (coastal and inland).

These links have resulted in further promotion of *eriss*'s scientific expertise with key outcomes being included in the Assessment, and provided support for projects being undertaken in the Alligator Rivers Region and more widely in northern Australia, most notably those commenced on tropical rivers and vulnerability of wetlands to climate change.

Porgera Environmental Advisory Komiti

Participation on the Porgera Environmental Advisory Komiti (PEAK) in Papua New Guinea has continued with independent technical advice on stream monitoring and waste management issues being provided. Dr Bob Pidgeon of *eriss* attended a PEAK meeting at Porgera in February 2004.

6.5 Science communication

Results of research and investigations undertaken by the Supervising Scientist Division are made available to key stakeholders and the scientific and wider community through publication in a range of in-house journals and reports. This information is also available on the Supervising Scientist's website at www.deh.gov.au/ssd, which was enhanced during the year with the addition of chemical, biological and radiological monitoring data.

In addition, staff of the Division have contributed articles to a range of external journals and presented papers at various conferences and workshops.

The Supervising Scientist's in-house journals and reports include: the Supervising Scientist Report series and Internal Report series for detailed reporting on scientific projects; Supervising Scientist Notes which are used to showcase specific projects amongst a wider audience; and the *eriss* Update Newsletter, which is published every second month to inform local and national stakeholders and others about the research projects and ongoing monitoring work of the Institute.

Other media, such as posters and educational or promotional materials, are also produced on a needs basis to suit specific requirements or events.

A full list of papers and reports published during 2003–04 is at Appendix 2.

International conferences and events attended by staff are listed below. Papers given at international and national conferences are included in Appendix 3.

In addition, staff have been involved in the presentation of numerous seminars and lectures, at our facility and in partnership with other scientific organisations such as the Charles Darwin University or the CSIRO. This is an important part of our contribution to the local scientific community.

Over the year *eriss* has taken on the supervision of a number of students doing post-graduate research projects. This includes students from Charles Darwin University and other universities around Australia. In addition, a number of the Division's staff hold positions within external scientific, technical and other professional organisations, including on various editorial boards and panels.

6.6 International conferences

Staff of the Supervising Scientist participated in a range of international conferences, seminars and workshops during 2003–04. Attendance at the majority of these events was funded, either partly or fully, from external sources. Participation in international events allows staff to share their knowledge and expertise with peers and is seen as important in allowing the Supervising Scientist Division to maintain its profile as a part of the broader scientific and technical community (see for example, 'Waterbirds around the world' below).

'Waterbirds around the world' conference

During the 'Waterbirds around the world' conference, held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in April 2004, Dr Max Finlayson presented an opening speech in his capacity as President of

Wetlands International and an invited plenary talk on climate change, wetlands and waterbirds. The Edinburgh Declaration is a ‘top-level’ summary of the issues considered by the conference, and was endorsed by conference participants. It addressed scientific and management issues and linked effectively to communication, education and public awareness. During the closing ceremony for the conference, Dr Finlayson was included in the official party introduced to HRH Prince Charles.



Figure 6.1 Dr Max Finlayson meets HRH Prince Charles at the ‘Waterbirds around the world’ conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in April 2004

Table 6.1 lists the international conferences, seminars and workshops attended by Supervising Scientist Division staff during 2003–04.

TABLE 6.1 OVERSEAS EVENTS 2003–04

Event	Location	Date
Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society of Agricultural Engineers	Montreal, Canada	July 2003
9 th International Conference on Environmental Management and Radioactive Waste Management	Oxford, England	September 2003
Meeting of Uranium Mine Remediation Exchange Group (UMREG)	Oxford, England	September 2003
Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) Asia/Pacific / Australasian Society for Ecotoxicology (ASE) Conference	Christchurch, New Zealand	September 2003
International Committee for Radionuclide Metrology (ICRM) International Conference on Methods and Application of Radioanalytical Chemistry	Vienna, Austria	October 2003

Table 6.1 continued

International Conference on the Protection of the Environment from the Effects of Ionizing Radiation	Stockholm, Sweden	October 2003
Millennium Ecosystems Assessment (contract work) Participation on Interview panel for position of CEO of Wetlands International and Wetlands International Board of Directors Meeting	Prague, Czech Republic & Wageningen, Netherlands	October/November 2004
Kyoto and Carbon Initiative Science Panel Workshop	Tokyo, Japan	November 2003
30 th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee	Gland, Switzerland	January 2004
Seventh Ordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP7) and project contracts	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	February 2004
Millennium Ecosystems Assessment Ramsar Synthesis Report Preparatory Report (project work)	Bali, Indonesia	March 2004
Waste Management '04 Conference	Tucson, USA	March 2004
Science Council of the Convention on Migratory Species Waterbirds Around the World Conference Wetlands International Board of Directors Meeting	Edinburgh & Glasgow, Scotland	March & April 2004
Millennium Ecosystems Assessment (project work)	Montreal, Canada	April 2004
ERICA Conference on the effects of ionizing radiation on non-human biota	Stockholm, Sweden	May 2004
Inaugural Conference of the International Risk Governance Council (IRGC)	Geneva, Switzerland	June 2004