

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 supervision activities of the Division and the results of our research and monitoring programmes. 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 also contributes 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 2002–03 the *eriss* Research Support and Communication programme continued to provide policy support, including coordination of internal communications and general workplanning, across the research and monitoring programmes. The programme has also provided for a range of ongoing and event-based communication activities. These activities work to emphasise and develop our interaction with the local Aboriginal community, scientific organisations, environmental groups and the general public.

Employment of Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people in *eriss* research and monitoring programmes continues to be an important part of this work and has helped to maintain positive working relationships. This has a two-way learning outcome: Aboriginal people getting first-hand knowledge 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 is developing over time, recently we have been able to employ both more and a greater range of Aboriginal people.

Over the year, *eriss* worked alongside Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal people throughout the Alligator Rivers Region on projects at Ranger and Nabarlek in Arnhem Land and on rehabilitation research in the Gunlom area in the south of Kakadu National Park. These projects involved sampling and study of bushtucker, fish, macroinvertebrates and air and water quality testing. Recent landscape monitoring work in the escarpment area to gather baseline data on isopods included a high level of indigenous involvement. In addition, we worked with Traditional Owners on non-mining related research such as on saltwater intrusion, mangrove distribution change and cane toad surveys. *eriss* also received assistance with the relocation of equipment and stores from Jabiru to the new facility in Darwin. This move was a significant and time consuming one and we were pleased to be able involve a local team.

The Mirrar people, who are the Traditional Owners of the Ranger and Jabiluka leases, continue to decline involvement in research or monitoring projects related to the Jabiluka mine. *eriss* respects the concerns of the Mirrar regarding uranium mining on their land and their decision not to participate in certain research and monitoring activities. We intend to maintain and continue to develop positive relationships with the Mirrar people and to keep communication channels open in our ongoing discussion and liaison with them about their concerns.

The programme coordinated consultation with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal associations, Parks Australia North and the NLC for research projects within Kakadu National Park. The Supervising Scientist and staff of the Division attended two Kakadu Board of Management meetings during the year to keep Board members informed about issues associated with Ranger and Jabiluka and to discuss ways to improve the way we communicate with Traditional Owners. The programme played a key consultation role in the landscape monitoring work in Kakadu that was recommended by the Independent Science Panel of ICSU and IUCN–The World Conservation Union.

As in past years, the programme has taken an active role in the coordination of other communication and general public relations activities. This includes participation in community events and festivals, attendance at relevant community committee meetings and providing tours of the *eriss* facilities for schools, environmental groups and interested people. The programme also provides cross-cultural training for staff within the Division.

Other event-oriented communication activities have included involvement in the Gunbalunya Open Day in Arnhem Land, the Innovation Festival at the Northern Territory University and in the World Environment Day celebrations at Window on the Wetlands.

With the move of *eriss* to Darwin, an increasing role for the programme has been to help facilitate the building of new and greater links with research partners and other groups and networks and to promote the work of *eriss* within the scientific community. Particular attention has been focused on keeping community interests informed of the relocation to Darwin and the continuing role of the Jabiru Field Station.

Another important element that the programme contributes to is the coordination and production of our in-house publications and report series, which is further described in Section 6.5 of this Annual report. 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. In particular, we will investigate the use of media that can complement our publications.

The programme supports operation of the National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research (*nctwr*). This includes provision of a secretariat role and assistance in the development and implementation of programmes to communicate and promote the aims and activities of the *nctwr*. 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 and the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA), in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) hosted the *Third International Symposium on the Protection of the Environment from Ionising Radiation (SPEIR 3)* in Darwin from 22 to 25 July 2002. A field trip to the Ranger mine was held on 26 July 2002. This highly successful international meeting, attended by over ninety delegates from all over the world, was the latest in a series of activities focused on considering the development of a system of environmental radiation protection. This is an area where *oss* is contributing at the forefront of current thinking and has been involved for some years. The IAEA published the Proceedings of the Symposium in May 2003.

The ICRP Task Group on the Protection of the Environment to which the Assistant Secretary of *oss*, Alex Zapantis, was appointed as a corresponding member, provided a report to the Main Commission of the ICRP on how the ICRP could contribute to environmental radiation protection. The ICRP will consider that advice in the formulation of its revised recommendations expected to be published in 2004–05.

The Supervising Scientist, Dr Arthur Johnston, has been invited to attend and present a paper at a meeting of experts organised by the IAEA to be held in Sweden in October 2003 on the topic of environmental radiation protection.

6.3.2 Publication of recommended environmental water requirements for the Daly River based on ecological, hydrological and biological principles

Staff of Supervising Scientist Division were contracted by the NT Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment (DIPE) to assist in the development of recommended environmental water requirements for the Daly River, NT, based on new multi-disciplinary research on the habitat requirements of aquatic fauna, riparian tree water use, submerged macrophytes, periphyton, phytoplankton, water quality and wetlands. The Daly Basin has been selected by the Northern Territory Government for major potential agricultural development, which, should it proceed, will intensify the current pastoral use by land subdivision, large-scale clearance of native vegetation and land modification. Given these proposed changes, the flow regimes and environmental water requirements of the Daly River must be understood to set appropriate environmental flows and water licence conditions for large scale agricultural development. The Daly River provides a unique opportunity to address these issues before significant agricultural development impacts on streamflow regimes and to protect its long recognised wild river status.

The Department of the Environment and Heritage and the Northern Territory Government, as part of the National River Health Environmental Flow Initiative, funded five projects on the Daly River which were completed in 2002. Supervising Scientist Division assisted in the

development of recommended environmental water requirements from this research that were consistent with maintaining the biota and wider ecosystem values of the Daly River, given competing demands of agriculture, recreation and tourism, conservation and Aboriginal culture.

Supervising Scientist Report 175 recommended environmental water requirements for the Daly River, Northern Territory, based on ecological, hydrological and biological principles. The report provides a concise overview of the work completed for the five projects; records the outcomes of a workshop on the environmental water requirements of the Daly River that was required under the funding arrangements for the National River Health Environmental Flow Initiative projects; proposes principles for determining environmental water allocations for the Daly River catchment; and recommends environmental water requirements for the Daly River between Claravale and Beebon crossings. These recommended environmental water allocations address ten significant environmental issues, such as the interdependence of streamflow and groundwater quantity and quality; critical discharges that cue various biotic responses; and implementation of biomonitoring, benchmarking and adaptive ecosystem management programs.

The report noted that there are also many significant potential threats to the health of the Daly River from further agricultural development and associated vegetation clearing. These threats include altered soil and catchment hydrology; accelerated soil erosion and sediment delivery to rivers; reduced groundwater recharge and base flow discharge; and increased incidence of fish kills.

6.4 Contribution 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

Independent advice on technical issues was provided to the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel on techniques for wetland inventory and assessment, management of invasive species and climate change. Specific documents and formal draft resolutions were submitted on wetland inventory and climate change for consideration at the Conference of Parties to the Convention held in November 2002.

At the request of the Bureau of the Convention a presentation on an integrated approach to wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring was given at the Conference, along with a presentation on the relevance of the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment to the Convention. After the Conference Dr Max Finlayson, the Director of *eriss*, was appointed as chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel for 2002–05.

6.4.2 Wetlands International Board of Directors

Dr Max Finlayson also continues as President of the Board of Directors of Wetlands International (2001–04). This followed a restructuring and affirmation of the science-based directions of Wetlands International. Specific technical collaboration with this organisation has centred on the completion of a protocol for an Asian Wetland Inventory, the promulgation of an integrated framework for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring, and assistance with the International Waterbirds Flyway Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in April 2004.

6.4.3 Other priorities

Work by *eriss* on a number of other wetland conservation programmes and issues continued over the year.

In June 2003, a Millennium Ecosystem Assessment workshop was organised in Darwin. This assisted in the provision of advice on wetland assessment and programme design for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment – a global scale assessment being funded by the World Bank and United Nations agencies. Specific contributions will continue with an emphasis on a review of existing information on the condition and ecosystem services provided by inland waters.

Participation on the Porgera Environmental Advisory Komiti in Papua New Guinea has continued with independent technical advice on stream monitoring and waste management issues being provided. *eriss* was also contracted to carry out a pilot study on stream macroinvertebrates in the headwaters of the Strickland River near the Porgera gold mine in the Western Highlands to evaluate their potential ecological significance and possible use in environmental monitoring.

Over 2002–03 *eriss* completed a project for the World Wildlife Fund to survey waterbirds at a proposed Ramsar site in the Southern Gulf Aggregation (Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland). The final report is soon to be released with a decision on formal submission for declaration under the Ramsar Convention expected later in 2003.

In May 2003, *eriss* provided expert advice to the Inquiry into issues associated with the progressive entry into the Northern Territory of cane toads being conducted by the Sessional Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory.

6.5 Science communication

Results of research and investigations undertaken by the 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, which was enhanced during the year with the addition of chemical, biological and radiological monitoring data (www.deh.gov.au/ssd). 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* Newsletter, which is published every second month to inform local and national interests about the research projects and ongoing monitoring work of the Institute.

Five reports in the Supervising Scientist Report (SSR) series and 54 reports in the Internal Report (IR) series were published in 2002–03.

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

Externally, 35 papers were published in peer-reviewed journals and national and international conference proceedings during 2002–03. A full list of these has been included at Appendix 1. International conferences attended by staff are listed below. Papers given at international and national conferences are included in Appendix 2.

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 Northern Territory University or 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 Northern Territory 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 2002–03. Attendance at the majority of these events was funded, either partly or fully, from external sources.

Table 6.1 lists the international conferences, seminars and workshops were attended by Supervising Scientist Division staff during 2002–03.

TABLE 6.1 OVERSEAS EVENTS 2002–03

Event	Location	Date
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Regional Training Course on Radioactive Waste Management	Jakarta, Indonesia	August 2002
3rd International Conference on Uranium Mining and Hydrogeology 2002	Freiberg, Germany	September 2002
Uranium Mining and Milling Remediation Multilateral Exchange Group (UMREG) Meeting	Freiberg, Germany	September 2002
EnviroInfo 2002 Conference	Vienna, Austria	September 2002

Wetlands International Programme Development and Training Meeting	Wageningen, The Netherlands	October 2002
Working Group 2 of the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment (MA)	Sao Jose, Brazil	November 2002
8th Ramsar Convention Meeting of Contracting Parties 8 (CoP8)	Valencia, Spain	November 2002
Workshop for Wetland Centres and Environmental Monitoring of Tropical and Subtropical Wetlands	Maun, Botswana	December 2002
Arafura Timor Seas Expert Forum (ATSEF)	Jakarta, Indonesia	January 2003
Waste Management '04 Conference	Paris, France	March 2003
5th International Conference on Environmental Futures	Zurich, Switzerland	March 2003
11th Meeting of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP11)	Gland, Switzerland	April 2003
4th Science Advisory Panel Meeting of the Kyoto and Carbon Initiative	Tokyo, Japan	May 2003
