

4 STATUTORY COMMITTEES

4.1 Introduction

The Supervising Scientist Division participates in, and provides secretariat and administrative support to, two statutory committees. These committees play important roles in facilitating discussion and consultation on environmental protection issues and in providing peer review of the scientific work of the Division.

4.2 Alligator Rivers Region Advisory Committee

The Alligator Rivers Region Advisory Committee (ARRAC) was established under the *Environment Protection (Alligator Rivers Region) Act 1978* to promote communication between the community and government and industry stakeholders on environmental issues associated with uranium mining in the Alligator Rivers Region.

Professor Charles Webb, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) at Charles Darwin University is the chair of ARRAC.

ARRAC offers a valuable forum for stakeholders to exchange views and relevant information on the issues that relate to environmental protection and rehabilitation from the effects of uranium mining.

A key function of ARRAC is to provide transparency in the processes applied to protect the people and environment in the region from the potential impacts of uranium mining.

All material provided to ARRAC becomes public information. Public disclosure of environmental performance data is a useful way to enhance trust within the group, thereby reducing the potential for misinformation. Information that is regularly provided to stakeholders through ARRAC meetings includes a summary and interpretation of monitoring data, periodic environmental reports from the mining companies, and audit outcomes for the mines.

A link to papers from previous meetings is available on the ARRAC web site at www.deh.gov.au/ssd/communication/committees/arrac/index.html.

ARRAC met twice in 2003–04: Jabiru in August 2003 and Darwin in December 2003. Issues discussed at the 2003–04 meetings included:

- water management projects at Ranger mine;
- Jabiluka long-term care and maintenance strategy;
- reports on the outcomes of investigations into specific events, including the incident of radiation exposure to contract workers at Ranger mine in November 2002.
- chemical and biological monitoring results at the Ranger and Jabiluka mines;

- outcomes of environmental audits and assessments of Ranger, Jabiluka and Nabarlek mines;
- radiological monitoring data of workers;
- report of the Senate Inquiry on the Environmental Regulation of Uranium Mining;
- outcomes of Minesite Technical Committee (MTC) meetings;
- ERA's progress towards ISO 14001 accreditation;
- reduction of bond for Nabarlek mine rehabilitation;
- draft Key Knowledge Needs document developed by ARRTC;
- status of South Alligator Valley mine rehabilitation.

4.3 Alligator Rivers Region Technical Committee

The Alligator Rivers Region Technical Committee (ARRTC) was established under sections 22A–22F of the *Environment Protection (Alligator Rivers Region) Act 1978*.

The primary aim of the Committee is to ensure that the quality of the science used in the research into, and assessment of, the protection of the environment from the impacts of uranium mining in the Alligator Rivers Region is of an appropriately high standard. This involves review of research activities by *eriss*, ERA, and other organisations. It also involves the review of the quality of the science used by *oss* and DBIRD to assess and approve proposals by uranium mining companies in the Alligator Rivers Region.

ARRTC reports openly, independently and without restriction. A link to papers from previous meetings is available on the ARRTC web site at www.deh.gov.au/ssd/communication/committees/arrtc/index.html.

ARRTC is chaired by Professor Barry Hart, the Director of the Water Studies Centre at Monash University, who has specific expertise in water quality and management with a focus on environmental chemistry as applied to surface water systems.

ARRTC's membership is appointed by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, and consists of:

- Independent scientific members with specific expertise (including ARRTC's chair), appointed following nomination by the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technical Societies (FASTS);
- Representatives of the Northern Land Council, the Northern Territory Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development, Energy Resources of Australia Ltd (for Ranger and Jabiluka), Pioneer International Ltd (for Nabarlek), and Parks Australia North;
- The Supervising Scientist.

Professor Douglas Holdway, one of ARRTC's independent scientific members, resigned in April 2004. As at 30 June 2004 the vacancy left by Professor Holdway, a freshwater aquatic ecotoxicologist, had not been filled, but is expected to be filled in the first half of 2004–05.

ARRTC met on 15–17 September 2003 (ARRTC's twelfth meeting) and 15–16 March 2004 (ARRTC's thirteenth meeting). Both meetings were held in Darwin, but the September 2003 meeting included a fly-in/fly-out site inspection of Nabarlek.



Figure 4.1 ARRTC members and stakeholders during Nabarlek site visit – September 2003

At its meetings ARRTC considered and discussed a wide range of issues, including:

- gaps in research conducted by *eriss*, ERA and Parks Australia North (including a review of mine-related research conducted between 1978 and 2002) as part of the development of ARRTC's Key Knowledge Needs;
- chemical, biological and radiological monitoring activities being conducted by DBIRD, ERA and the Supervising Scientist;
- Jabiluka issues (with a focus on Long Term Care and Maintenance developments);
- Ranger issues (with a focus on the final landform design and revegetation strategy);
- Nabarlek issues (with a focus on rehabilitation and revegetation issues);
- status of South Alligator Valley rehabilitation activities;
- hydrological data requirements for the Alligator Rivers Region;
- Report of the Senate Inquiry on the Environmental Regulation of Uranium Mining;
- Independent Science Panel (ISP) Landscape Scale Analysis project;
- social issues, including communication with Aboriginal Traditional Owners;
- updates from the stakeholders represented at ARRTC.

During 2002–03, ARRTC drafted a series of high level Key Knowledge Needs based on their own assessment of the existing body of scientific knowledge on mining in the Alligator Rivers Region and the issues that are likely to become more important as the Ranger mine moves towards eventual closure and rehabilitation. This is described in further detail in the Supervising Scientist's 2002–03 Annual Report.

Those Key Knowledge Needs were refined at the ARRTC meetings held in 2003–04, with a final Key Knowledge Needs document being endorsed by members out-of-session following the March 2004 meeting. This document is at Appendix 1 of this Annual Report.

These Key Knowledge Needs are an important input into prioritising and planning future research activities, and will provide the basis for mining-related research activities.