

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2010

Program: Division or Agency: 1: SSD **Question No:** 2

Broad Topic: Rum Jungle technical working group

Proof Hansard Page and Date 110-111 (18/10/10)
or Written Question:

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM—Last time you spoke to us about the national partnership agreement on the rehabilitation of the Rum Jungle uranium site and explained that you are part of the technical working group that oversights the activities of that working group. Can you table the full membership of the technical working group, particularly names and organisations and any expertise that is relevant to the membership of the group?

...

Mr Hughes—It has formal membership in terms of departments or organisations.

Senator LUDLAM—So I am asking for the full membership of that working group.

Mr Hughes—Okay. It is the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism, Supervising Scientist Division, the Northern Territory Department of Resources, the Northern Territory Department of—sorry, I only know the acronym, and it is rather large.

Senator LUDLAM—And I will probably not know it. Could you please table the agencies and the names of the people who attend those meetings? You can take that on notice.

Mr Hughes—Okay.

Answer:

The membership of the Rum Jungle Working Group is defined in Schedule A to the National Partnership Agreement on the management of the former Rum Jungle mine site and comprises representatives from the following government and stakeholder organisations:

Australian Government

- Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism;
- Supervising Scientist Division of the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities;

Northern Territory Government

- Department of Resources;
- Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport; and

Other Stakeholders

- Northern Land Council.

No representatives of the member organisations are specifically appointed and the actual individuals who participate in the meetings may vary from time to time.

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Program: Division or Agency: 1: SSD **Question No:** 3
Broad Topic: ERA monitoring of Ranger mine
Proof Hansard Page and Date 111 (18/10/10)
or Written Question:

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM—Thank you very much. I want to come back to the electrical conductivity spike in April of this year that we have spoken about a couple of times downstream from the Ranger mine in Kakadu National Park, including uranium in the water. We had quite a long exchange about real time water monitoring and found ourselves in furious agreement that such a thing is good. You had undertaken to advocate real time public water monitoring as the best way to test and evaluate contamination of waterways downstream from the Ranger mine. You indicated that you would raise that at the next mine site technical committee. I am hoping that you have got some good news for us as to how your advocacy has gone in that regard.

Mr Hughes—That has been raised at the mine site technical committee. It has also been raised with Energy Resources of Australia, who have undertaken to install a vastly increased real-time monitoring network around the site and in the stream.

Senator LUDLAM—What commitments or undertakings have been made on what that network will look like and when it will be in place?

Mr Hughes—I cannot make any undertakings on how long it will take ERA to install the network that they are intending. They were hoping to have it in place for this wet season. We will be running our upstream and downstream continuous monitoring stations this wet season and we intend this year to be publishing continuous monitoring data on our website.

Senator LUDLAM—That is great. Do you know how many monitoring points there will be on the ERA sites?

Mr Hughes—I understand they are intending to install seven monitoring points.

Senator LUDLAM—Are you able to provide for us on notice a map of where they are likely to be located?

Mr Hughes—I guess we can do that, yes.

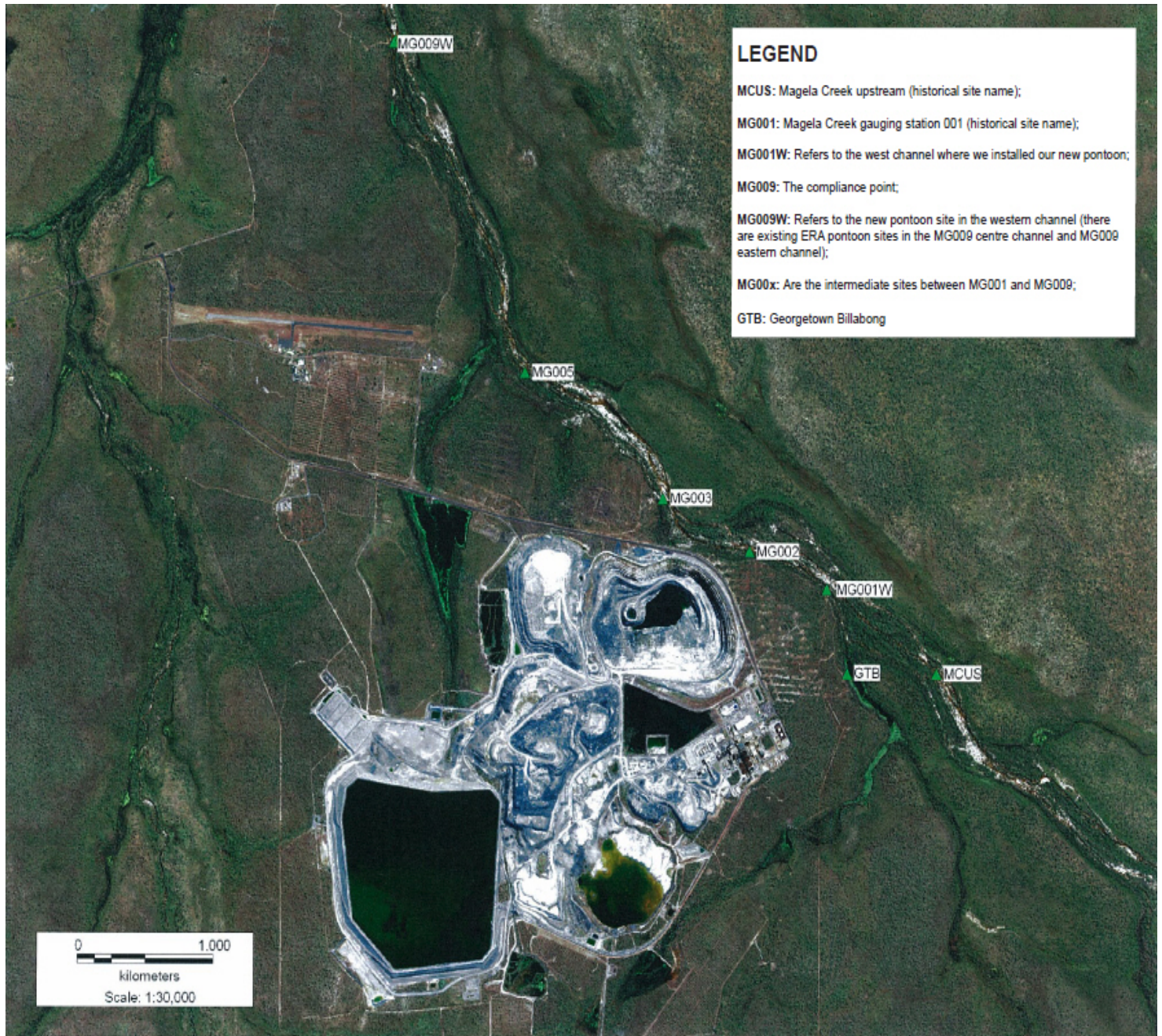
Answer:

See attached map.

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Ranger Uranium Mine, NT – Locations of surface water monitoring points
Map provided by Energy Resource of Australia Ltd – November 2010.

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Program: Division or Agency: 1: SSD **Question No:** 4
Broad Topic: Ranger mine - Water quality monitoring
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written Question
or Written Question:

Senator Abetz asked:

1. With regard to the water quality monitoring program for Ranger, is the monitoring programme being expanded or becoming more intense?
2. Could you please update us on how actively is the Supervising Scientist Division monitoring this issue? In light of what has been discussed, do you consider that the level of resourcing you allocate to the monitoring of the Ranger mine in general to still be adequate?
3. The issue of seepage from the Ranger tailings dam continues to attract attention. Has there now been any movement of radionuclides away from the immediate footprint of the dam and if there has been any impact on Kakadu National Park?
4. With further data now gathered, can you please provide any update on results from the monitoring program in terms of the levels of radionuclide migration from the ranger tailings dam?
5. With further water quality information now gathered in Magela Creek, what is it telling us for that EC Spike reported in April? Has the monitoring programme indicated that any radionuclides have impacted the water anywhere?

Answer:

1. Additional surface water monitoring points are currently being installed by Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) upstream and downstream of Ranger which will enhance the level of water quality data and information available to relevant stakeholders.
2. The Supervising Scientist Division undertakes continuous and event-based water quality monitoring in order to ensure any changes in water quality are detected and appropriate management responses instigated in a timely way. The current level of resources applied to monitoring activities is considered appropriate and regularly reviewed.
3. Seepage from under the Ranger Tailings Storage Facility (TSF) is moving very slowly to the north of the TSF, but remains well within the mine lease boundary. As stated during the hearing (18 October 2010 proof hansard EC 112), there has been no impact on Kakadu National Park from the Ranger tailings dam.
4. As stated during the hearing (18 October 2010 proof hansard EC 112), there are two shallow bores monitored by the Northern Territory Department of Resources as part of their check monitoring program that have revealed slightly elevated uranium values. The chemical

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fingerprint of those bores is not consistent with process water but is more consistent with pond water or incident water that has seeped into the walls themselves not from the tailings dam. ERA has been asked to undertake some investigations into those and has undertaken to do a lot more work on those areas.

5. As stated during the hearing (18 October 2010 proof hansard EC 112), the normal monitoring program in Magela Creek is to take weekly grab samples, however, the Supervising Scientist Division has in place some auto samplers which are triggered by the continuous monitoring devices. Analyses of samples captured by the auto samplers during those EC spikes confirmed that the levels of radionuclides were quite low.