

5 COMMUNICATION AND LIAISON

5.1 Introduction

Effective communication with all stakeholders is an integral component of the Supervising Scientist Division's functions. Of particular importance is the need to inform traditional Aboriginal owners and other Aboriginal people living in the Alligator Rivers Region about the activities of the Supervising Scientist including the supervisory activities of the Office of the Supervising Scientist (*oss*) and the research and monitoring programmes undertaken or managed by the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist (*eriss*). Communication with research partners and other stakeholders within government, industry, science and the general community is also vital in the context of the research and supervisory functions of the Division. 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.

5.2 Research support and communication

During 2005–06, communication staff continued to provide support across the research and monitoring programmes: firstly by building on existing and initiating new internal communication activities and, secondly, by strengthening stakeholder consultation on the activities being undertaken by the Supervising Scientist within the Alligator Rivers Region. New links have been built and existing ones strengthened with research partners and other groups and networks to promote the work of *eriss* and Supervising Scientist within the scientific community.

The Division was actively involved in a number of event-based communication activities such as open days and festivals with local communities in Kakadu National Park and the Alligator Rivers Region (Section 5.2.3). These activities further develop the depth of our interaction with the local Aboriginal community and with other research organisations, non-governmental environmental groups and the general public.

5.2.1 Indigenous employment and consultation

Traditional Aboriginal owners and other local Aboriginal people actively participated in SSD's research and monitoring programme during the year, supporting field activities such as creekside monitoring, the water quality monitoring associated with Ranger mine, collection of mussels and fish, sampling of macroinvertebrates and general field station activities. Indigenous employment provided the opportunity for *eriss* staff to work alongside landowners on their country, sharing knowledge and gaining greater insight into traditional cultural values. It also gave indigenous people opportunities to gain first hand knowledge and valuable technical skills and understanding of the research and monitoring programme.

We wrote last year that future development of research support and communication within the Division would focus on identifying ways to enhance our reporting of information to traditional Aboriginal owners and the indigenous communities within the Alligator Rivers Region. A number of initiatives outlined below have progressed this.

For example, a local Kakadu Traditional Owner joined the field station team as an indigenous trainee in 2005. Recently, he was appointed to an ongoing full-time position as Communications and Monitoring Support Officer with *eriss* which means that information about the work of the Division can now be delivered in local indigenous language thus strengthening our relationship and ability to communicate with traditional Aboriginal owners and other indigenous people in the Region.

We have maintained regular informal contact with indigenous communities in the Region including the Mirarr people – the traditional owners of the land on which Ranger and Jabiluka lie. This regular contact has afforded more opportunity for understanding of our role and function and helped us keep the local communities well informed about our monitoring and research programmes. Informal contact has involved visits to and from local communities in the Region, including interested indigenous people observing our monitoring and research activities both in the field and in the laboratory.



Figure 5.1 Mudginberri residents visit the Darwin Laboratories. Here they are being shown the steps involved in processing mussel samples in one of the Environmental Radioactivity laboratories.

Communications staff were responsible for consulting not only with traditional owners and other indigenous organisations, but also the Northern Land Council and Parks Australia North on the Division's activities in the area. The consultative process ensures that all stakeholders are provided with information on the research, monitoring and supervisory activities being undertaken by the Division. For example, SSD helped with the initial consultation related to defining closure expectations for the Ranger Project Area. This

meeting was held on country with the Mirarr traditional owners. It was a multi-party forum with representatives from various stakeholder groups including SSD, Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines, Energy Resources of Australia Ltd and the Northern Land Council.

We have also ensured on-going collaborative engagement of Aboriginal people in the closure process through employment of traditional owners in projects associated with development of closure criteria, such as the collection of macroinvertebrates aimed at developing surface water quality closure criteria for Ranger billabongs.



Figure 5.2 Consultation with Mirarr traditional owners at Mula in Kakadu National Park

The Director of *eriss* is a member of the Kakadu Research Advisory Committee. This is another way in which we communicate our work to the traditional Aboriginal owners of the Park.

Finally, cross-cultural training for staff to enable more effective communication and working relations with indigenous people continues to be provided at regular intervals. This year the training was provided by a family of traditional owners from western Arnhem Land.

5.2.2 Internal communications

Regular general staff and research programme meetings provide a forum for communication of information between staff at all levels. The formation of support groups (eg Monitoring Support, Spatial Users, Knowledge Management) to address important strategic business issues has enhanced communication of important information around the Division.

A number of IiP (Investor in People) activities have been undertaken including making available Canberra-based seminars by videolink and by holding IiP-supported social functions that help keep people in touch and foster staff relations. Staff have also delivered seminars internally (both at Darwin and Jabiru) on research to be presented at conferences.

The Division's internal weekly staff newsletter, *Newsbrief*, is produced by communications staff and informs staff of activities undertaken by those in Darwin and Jabiru. It contains articles on research, field trips and communication activities that are sourced from our staff, profiles and photos of new starters, and a diary of upcoming events and staff movements. *Newsbrief* is also used as a source of articles for external communications such as What's New on the web site and *InsiDEH*, the Department's internal newsletter.

A major Departmental communication initiative has had special significance for SSD. During the year, the Department implemented a major overhaul of the DEH Intranet site. For many internal service areas, this only required an update to, or restructure of, existing content. However, for many Divisions such as SSD, it meant creation of a complete new site under the DEH umbrella. Launched in June 2006, the new Intranet will play an important communications role providing staff with a vital resource for Divisional and Departmental information. Features on the SSD site include brief information about teams and individuals, our business activities, policies and procedures, contact information, a 'how to' index, and links to research and monitoring information on our external SSD web site. User testing was undertaken towards the end of the year highlighting areas for further work.

5.2.3 Communication with technical stakeholders and general community

Coordination of other communication and general public relations activities was facilitated by Division staff throughout the year.

The Division participated in a number of event-based communication activities including exhibits at Gunbalanya Open Day in Arnhem Land, Mahbilil Festival in Jabiru and the CSIRO Top End Science Fair in Darwin. Information stalls were run at various local conferences including Australian Society for Fish Biology 2005 and NARGIS 2005. All of these activities served to enhance understanding of our work and role and raise our profile within the local and wider community.



Figure 5.3 SSD display at the Gunbalanya Open Day

Other communications activities of note during the year included:

- Alligator Rivers Region Advisory Committee (ARRAC) meetings. These meetings bring together members and observers from various stakeholder groups and provide a forum for information exchange on activities in the Region and opportunity to discuss

concerns. The traditional associated golf game and social event provide further opportunity to foster external relations.

- Ecosystem Establishment Workshop held with key stakeholders to identify outstanding knowledge needs for the establishment of ecosystems on the Ranger mine site following closure. A key outcome of the workshop was the recommendation and endorsement by all stakeholder participants that demonstration landform vegetation areas be established at Ranger by December 2007.
- Presentation to the Indigenous Mining and Enterprise Taskforce meeting held in Jabiru, outlining the role of SSD in the region with particular focus on indigenous involvement in SSD activities.
- Participation in the Kakadu Junior Ranger Programme, facilitating a lesson on research and monitoring in Kakadu that focused on the role of the Supervising Scientist and the techniques used in SSD monitoring programmes.
- Co-hosting of weeds workshop with Earth Water Life Sciences (EWLS) and Energy Resources of Australia Ltd on identification of existing weeds, the skills needed for identification, and information on potential weeds not yet present in Kakadu.
- Participation in Parks Australia North workshop on the issue of salvinia in Yellow Water in Kakadu.
- Hosting information session centred round a BBQ at Gunbalanya about Nabarlek-related work. Staff also attended the Nabarlek Annual General Meeting and spoke to Nabarlek traditional owners about SSD research work currently being undertaken on the old mine site and on-site supervision and audit activities.

5.3 National and international environmental protection activities

5.3.1 Environmental radiation protection

In December 2003 the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) decided to develop a framework for the assessment of radiation effects in non-human species. To assist in implementing this decision, the ICRP established Committee 5 to consider the protection of non-human organisms. The former Supervising Scientist, Dr Arthur Johnston, was appointed to this committee which first met in September 2005. Dr Johnston's role with the ICRP continues beyond his retirement from the Australian Public Service.

The ICRP recognises that nations already have highly developed regulatory systems in place for the protection of the environment. For this reason it will not make specific recommendations on a regulatory regime for the protection of the environment from ionising radiation. Rather, it will develop a framework that can then be used by nations to integrate within their own existing legislative and regulatory systems.

5.3.2 Basslink

The recently-commissioned Basslink interconnector allows the trade of electricity between Tasmania and the mainland. The original proposal was assessed and approved under the *Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974*, and one of the conditions of approval required the establishment of the Gordon River Scientific Reference Committee (GRBSRC) to consider a range of scientific and technical issues associated with the implementation of the Gordon River Basslink Monitoring Programme and other Gordon River Basslink scientific reports. In September 2003, Dr Chris Humphrey and Dr Ken Evans of *eriss* (SSD) were appointed to represent the Australian Government on the GRBSRC. Drs Humphrey and Evans have undertaken field inspection of Gordon River monitoring sites and assessed the annual monitoring reports and the Basslink baseline report. The Basslink baseline report has been completed, following rigorous review by the GRBSRC during 2005–06. Monitoring and assessment (and their review by the GRBSRC) of Basslink's environmental impacts upon the Gordon River will continue.

5.4 National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research

The National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research (*nctwr*) is a collaborative venture between the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist (*eriss*) and three university partners: James Cook University, Charles Darwin University and the University of Western Australia.

Communication and extension activities for a major *nctwr* project, the Tropical Rivers Inventory and Assessment Project (TRIAP), have largely been supported by a dedicated officer in *eriss*. More information about TRIAP is contained in Section 3.11.

More information about *nctwr* administrative arrangements during 2005–06 is contained in Section 6.8.

5.5 Science communication and education

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. These include: the Supervising Scientist and Internal Report series for detailed reporting on scientific projects; and the Supervising Scientist Note series, which is used to showcase specific projects to a wider audience. A full list of papers and reports published during 2005–06 is at Appendix 2. (See www.deh.gov.au/ssd for these publications as well as current results for the chemical, biological and radiological monitoring programmes.)

In addition, staff of the Division have contributed articles to a range of external journals and presented papers at various conferences and workshops. Papers given at international and national conferences are included in Appendix 3.

Other media, such as posters and educational or promotional materials, are also produced on a needs basis to suit specific requirements or events. A major overhaul of these materials is planned for next year.

Staff have been involved in the organisation and presentation of conferences, seminars and lectures, at our facility and in partnership with other research organisations such as Charles Darwin University, and professional bodies such as the Royal Australian Chemical Institute, the Australian Water Association, the Spatial Sciences Institute and the Institute of Engineers Australia. Involvement in these activities further illustrates the Division's commitment to the advancement of professional practice and communication of the work of SSD and is an important part of our contribution to the local scientific and professional communities.

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. *eriss* also hosts researchers from other organisations to undertake collaborative funded projects, or for sabbatical periods.

5.6 International conferences

Staff of the Supervising Scientist participated in a range of international conferences, seminars and workshops during 2005–06 (Table 5.1). 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.

TABLE 5.1 OVERSEAS CONFERENCES, SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS ATTENDED BY SUPERVISING SCIENTIST DIVISION STAFF IN 2005–06

Event	Location	Date
Mediterranean Wetlands CODDE Workshop	Lisbon, Portugal	July 2005
9th International Mine Water Association Congress	Oviedo, Spain	September 2005
4th International Conference on Uranium Mining and Hydrogeology	Freiberg, Germany	September 2005
Uranium Mining and Milling Remediation Exchange Group	Freiberg, Germany	September 2005
Organising Committee for the IAEA's 2007 International Conference on Environmental Radioactivity	Vienna, Austria	October 2005
12th Australian and New Zealand Geomorphology Group Conference	Taipa Bay, New Zealand.	February 2006