

# International Conference on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management, Decommissioning, Environmental Protection and Remediation: Ensuring Safety and Enabling Sustainability



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## South Alligator Valley remediation: safety and sustainability in a National Park.

The South Alligator Valley in Australia's Northern Territory (NT) was the location for 12 or more small uranium mines in the 1950s and 1960s. The mines were abandoned un-remediated, and the area continued as a pastoral cattle station for the next 20 years. In the 1980s the area was explored again for platinum and gold whilst simultaneously being handed back to traditional owners and designated as stage three of the dual world heritage listed Kakadu National Park (KNP). In the late 1980s exploration was closed down and the area incorporated into KNP through a lease-back arrangement with the traditional owners. A requirement of the lease was that the Federal Government would ensure all evidence of former mining activity was remediated within 15 years of the start of the lease.

Work to assess the scope of the issues began in the mid 1990s and a series of studies were undertaken to locate all the relevant sites characterise them, and carry out risk assessments for physical, radiological and other risks. All negotiations were undertaken with the traditional owners directly in a major new strategy for such works. The final plan had to take into account the need to meet contemporary safety standards in all areas as well as meeting cultural and other expectations of the traditional owners. At the same time the works had to result in areas still being able to be used as a national park in a sustainable manner with a minimum requirement for specialist management or access restrictions.

The presentation describes the situation at the start of works before describing how issues of safety and sustainability were discussed and agreed with the various stakeholders –Federal and NT governments, Park Authorities- as well as the traditional owners to arrive at a final remediation plan and the works to implement that plan. The story then progresses to the post remediation phase with details of the monitoring regime and checks to ascertain that the long term sustainability of the work continues to be achieved. Finally, there is a discussion of the lessons learned from all phases of the programme and an indication of how these lessons are being applied elsewhere to ensure safety and sustainability requirements are met in an optimised manner.

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