

The Namibian uranium mining model: Voluntary sector initiatives underpinned by a regulatory safety net ensures best practice - an update.

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Namibia has extensive deposits of low-grade uranium and is regarded as a region of global importance for this source of energy. Namibia also has a long history of uranium mining, dating back to 1976, when Rio Tinto's Rössing uranium mine opened.

The Namibian Government's position on uranium mining is clear. His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, reaffirmed that "Namibia's mineral resources (including uranium) are to be strategically exploited and optimally benefited, providing equitable opportunities for all Namibians to participate in the industry, while ensuring that environmental impacts are minimized and investments resulting from mining are made to develop other sustainable industries and human capital for long-term national development."

Building on a presentation at URAM in 2009, this paper shares Namibia's experiences from the past five years: discusses the challenges faced by the Namibian Government and the uranium industry in with the development of a robust, independent national regulatory and monitoring framework.

- How Namibia has implemented the two necessary levels of independence: capable government oversight and third-party evaluation of industry's sustainable development practices.
- How Namibia implemented mutually-beneficial partnerships to ensure that adequate capacity exists. Voluntary product stewardship schemes have arisen out of the need for the industry to balance their pursuit of economic gain with environmental and social concerns.
- How industry has built on WNA standards in developing voluntary product stewardship schemes to gain majority sector participation.
- How the Namibian Government has taken important steps in responding to the dearth of inadequate legislation with the promulgation of The Minerals (Prospecting & Mining) Act, No 33 of 1992 ,the Minerals Policy (2005), Atomic Energy and Radiation Protection Act, 5 of 2005 and the Environmental Management Act, 7 of 2007.
- How the Government and Industry development of a cross-sectoral, government-led "Strategic Environmental Assessment"(SEA), crucial for the Government to fully understand how the mines, both on their own and in combination, will impact upon the receiving environment.
- How the Environmental and Radiation Regulations were rolled out with the creation of the Strategic Environmental Management Plan (SEMP) office at the Ministry of Mines and Energy, Namib Ecological Restoration and Monitoring Unit (NERMU) and the Namibian Uranium Institute (NUI)
- How the full implementation of the Atomic Energy and Radiation Protection Act was achieved with a fully operational National Radiation Protection Authority (NRPA) and Environmental Commissioners Office. The NRPA and Environmental Commissioner conduct multiple inspections every year at all uranium mines and mills to ensure that radiation levels are kept well below regulatory limits, protect workers and the public from other potential hazards, and verify that all activities are environmentally responsible and safe.

The Namibian approach is an example of voluntary sector initiatives underpinned by a regulatory safety net to ensure environmental and social sustainability and internationally accepted health standards across the board.

Primary authors: Mr TIBINYANE, Axel (National Radiation Protection Authority (Namibia)); Dr SWIEGERS, Wotan (Atomic Energy Board (Namibia_))

Presenters: Mr TIBINYANE, Axel (National Radiation Protection Authority (Namibia)); Dr SWIEGERS, Wotan (Atomic Energy Board (Namibia_))

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