

Small Scale Uranium Mine Remediation in Northern Australia.

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Uranium was mined at 13 locations in the South Alligator Valley of Australia's Northern Territory, during the 1950s and 60s. At the completion of mining sites were simply abandoned and there was no remediation as this was not then a legal requirement.

The valley is part of an area that was incorporated into the adjacent World Heritage Kakadu National Park in the mid 1980s. As a result, in 1986, an inventory of the abandoned mines and associated facilities was undertaken by the Australian Federal Government to assess the environmental liabilities due to the old mines. In 1988, a program for the reduction of physical and radiological hazards at each of the identified sites was drawn up. This programme was undertaken over the dry seasons from 1990 to 1992.

Up to this point in the valley's history little attention had been paid to the concerns and long term aspirations of traditional land owners, the Gunlom Land Trust. However, in 1996 the Aboriginal Traditional Owners were granted Freehold Native Title to the area, which they immediately leased back to the Government so it would remain as a part of Kakadu National Park. A condition of the lease was that all evidence of former mining activity should be remediated by 2015.

In 1997 the consultation and planning processes to develop a remediation program began. The plans were drawn up over a number of years and, after funding was granted in 2006, programme implementation commenced in 2007. The paper describes the planning and consultation stages, experiences involving the cleaning up of remnant uranium mill tailings and the successful implementation of the initial remediation works at a number of sites. In conclusion, the paper deals with the on-going planning and design processes for the final remediation works, which are due to be completed in 2009.