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MEDIA RELEASE
[for immediate release]

Radioactive toxins at popular local waterhole

‘Statements by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection that it has identified ‘elevated levels of contaminants’ at the moth-balled Ben Lomond uranium mine, 40 km from Townsville are an enormous understatement according to North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) Cordinator Maree Dibella.

“The fact is that the mine has been releasing radioactive contaminants that are not just ‘elevated’ but exceed Australian and international standards.

“And it is not a case of the mine site having the ‘potential to release contaminants’, as the Department states, it has been doing so for at least five and maybe up to 33 years”, Ms Dibella said.

“NQCC asked and received the publicly available data from DEHP then alerted them to the fact that the mine had been in contravention of environmental standards for a period of years.

“Radiation, arsenic, lead and uranium in both groundwater and surface water of Keelbottom Creek were sampled by the leaseholder throughout five years from 2010-15. The water sample results show an alarming exceedance of the Environmental Authority conditions.

“We were horrified to discover that both alpha radiation and arsenic in Keelbottom Creek far exceeded the prescribed limits” said Ms Dibella. [Keelbottom Creek is listed by Travel NQ as one of Townsville’s best freshwater swimming holes](#) and flows into the Burdekin River. Medical science tells us that there is no safe level of radioactivity.

“Departmental promises ‘to further strengthen safeguards’ suggest that strong safeguards have been in place. This is obviously not the case. It is imperative that clean-up measures be commenced immediately and the owner, Uranium Mineral Ventures Incorporated (UMVI), be held to account.”

‘We are disappointed that governments have failed to alert the community to potential exposure to radiation and heavy metals. The communities that live in the vicinity of the Ben Lomond mine have been let down; the residents of Charters Towers whose drinking water comes from a weir downstream of the pollution, the farmers who rely on the Burdekin groundwater for farming, and the visitors to

Keelbottom Creek who are unknowingly being exposed to radiation and heavy metals”, said Ms Dibella.

“This situation has been occurring for years. The public deserves to know the whole truth, why the protections have failed them, and what exactly will be done about the situation.

“This is also a strong example as to why nuclear is not the clean energy answer. It is dangerous to mine, process and transport, and there is a massive pollution liability with its waste products” says Ms Dibella.

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Contact: Maree Dibella, 0428 987 535

BACKGROUND

The Ben Lomond uranium mine is 40 kilometres west of Townsville, sitting directly at the head of the Burdekin River watershed. Keelbottom Creek is a tributary to the Burdekin River.

Full operational underground mining at the Ben Lomond site never got off the ground. A permit to mine uranium was granted before the Environmental Impact Statement was completed. Due to sustained community opposition in the 1980s and an eventual Federal Government ban on uranium mining in 1983, the mine ceased operations. Radioactive ore was brought to the surface, placed on dumps and covered. The radiation and heavy metal pollution comes from these dumps.

Groundwater data

Alpha radiation: 62% exceed EA conditions, highest reading is 274x the limit

Beta radiation: 16% exceed EA conditions, highest reading is 59x the limit

Mobile uranium: 5% exceed EA conditions, highest reading is 3.4x the limit

Arsenic: 84% exceed EA conditions, highest reading is 39x the limit

Lead: 31% exceed EA conditions, highest reading is 98x the limit

Surface water data (Keelbottom Creek)

Alpha Radiation: exceeded in 44 of the 234 samples (33% exceed) with the highest level on 17.05.12 of 1.45 (15x the limit of 0.1)

Mobile uranium: exceeded in 22 of the 262 samples (14% exceed) with the highest level on 14.08.13 of 0.107 (5x the limit of 0.02).

Arsenic: exceeded in 43 of the 261 samples (17% exceed) with the highest level on 12.12.14 of 4.39 (627x the limit).

Lead: exceeded in 5 of the 261 samples (2% exceed) with the highest level on 12.12.14 of 0.54 (5x the limit).

NQCC is the voice for the environment in North Queensland, campaigning as the peak non-government environmental organisation in our region since 1974.

We protect the environment through advocacy and education, promote the values of the natural environment, and engage with policy and planning processes to advocate ecologically sustainable development.