

MINING, TAILINGS FACILITIES, WATER QUALITY PROTECTION GUIDELINES

2561. Hon Nigel Hallett to the Minister for Education and Training representing the Minister for the Environment

I refer to the 'Water Quality Protection Guidelines No.2, Mining and Mineral Processing, Tailings Facilities 2000' which I understand were endorsed/signed and agreed upon by the Waters and Rivers Commission, Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Minerals and Energy -

- (1) Is it correct that part of this document referred to above states 'Tailings facilities should not be constructed over watercourses, as these drainage pathways are often underlain by fractured rock zones that provide porous seepage paths to the external environment. To minimise unnecessary impacts on neighbouring leases the facilities should not be constructed on the boundaries of leases.'?
- (2) If no to (1), will the Minister quote the full text from the document?
- (3) Can the Minister give the reasons why the Department of Environmental Protection previously saw the need to minimise unnecessary impacts on neighbouring leases given that the Department acknowledges that seepage is inevitable through the floor of the tailings dam which obviously will cause the water table to rise causing an unnatural elevated water table, cause salinisation of the soil, adverse impacts on neighbouring leases, and land tenure, infrastructure etc along with potential impacts on vegetation?
- (4) If no to (3), why not?
- (5) Can the Minister explain what specific types of environmental unnecessary impacts caused by seepage clearly covered under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* other than impacts on vegetation is there a need to minimise, prevent or eliminate on neighbouring leases?
- (6) If no to (5), why not?
- (7) Is it correct that part of the above referred to document states 'The DEP requires vegetation monitoring around tailings storage facilities. Monitoring should be undertaken quarterly using techniques such as photography, aerial surveys and vegetation mapping'?
- (8) If no to (7), will the Minister quote the full text from the document?
- (9) Can the Minister explain the reasons why the DEP previously required vegetation monitoring techniques such as vegetation mapping, given that vegetation mapping combined with aerial surveys and photography would be quite expensive?
- (10) If no to (9), why not?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:

The Minister for the Environment; Science has provided the following response:

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Refer to response to Q1.
- (3) The guidelines were developed in consultation between the Water and Rivers Commission, Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Minerals and Energy. These guidelines were developed to establish actions required by operators to meet their obligations under all of the Acts administered by those Departments and to also guide operators into areas of best practice that may be over and above legislative requirements.

The Department of Environment has been aware of concerns about seepage from tailings dams in the Goldfields for some years. This seepage could involve hyper-saline water used to move tailings as a slurry. The chief concerns were damage to surrounding vegetation, possible influence on water quality in any nearby surface run-off capture dams and borefields. As a guideline, it needs to be related to local conditions and relevant environmental values.

- (4) Refer to response to Q3.
- (5) Unnecessary impacts covered by the Mining and Mineral Processing Guidelines 2000 were not restricted to those defined under the Regulations of the Environmental Protection Act 1986. The then Department of Minerals and Energy was a co-author of the Guidelines, and along with the Department of Environmental Protection and Water and Rivers Commission were seeking to provide statements of best practice for the mineral industry that balanced environmental, economic and social factors. The main unnecessary impacts considered by the Department of Environment at the time of preparation of the Guidelines are covered in the response to Q3.

- (6) Refer to response to Q5.
- (7) Yes.
- (8) Refer to response to Q7.
- (9) The Mining and Mineral Processing Guidelines were aimed at stating best practice for the mining and mineral processing industry. When carrying out regulation under Part V of the Environmental Protection Act 1986, it was expected that an assessment of the local environment would form a key part of the data used to formulate a works approval or licence. The conditions set would take these environmental factors into consideration. Part V of the Environmental Protection Act 1986 requires the Department to develop practical conditions, and the wording of practical in the Act includes consideration of costs. Conversely the licence conditions need to balance these matters.

If the proponent felt that such conditions were unreasonable, there are appeal provisions available under the Act. It is unlikely that vegetation surveys would be required unless surrounding vegetation was considered important for environmental reasons (including mitigating dust generation and soil erosion).
- (10) Refer to response to Q9.
