



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 4 July 2018

National Radioactive Waste Management Facility: Facility investigations create jobs and investment for Aboriginal people

Thirty Adnyamathanha community members were recently employed at Wallerberdina Station, conducting site studies for the proposed National Radioactive Waste Management Facility.

Called site characterisation works, the studies were undertaken by AECOM from mid-April to June, and aim to establish whether the site is technically suitable for such a facility.

The works, together with an aboriginal cultural heritage assessment and results from community consultation, will help determine if Wallerberdina Station or another site is chosen for the Facility.

Over a 7-week period, 30 Adnyamathana community members, facilitated by the Viliwarinha Yura Aboriginal Corporation, were hired to assist and advise the AECOM team.

They were involved in numerous field activities, including:

- monitoring and protecting cultural heritage values during field activities such as drilling bore holes and groundwater wells
- cultural heritage awareness inductions
- conducting ecological surveys of the site and its surrounds.
- catering for the AECOM workforce and its sub-contractors throughout the field program; and
- installation of cattle-proof fencing around the investigation wells.

This followed an independent Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment conducted by RPS with local traditional owners, which established an appropriate area of the nominated land, where further site investigations could take place. This report will be released shortly.

“The interactions AECOM had with the local community were very beneficial for both parties,” said AECOM’s Principal Hydrogeologist, Melinda Morris. “We shared knowledge and built relationships”.

“Members of the Adnyamathana who worked on the fieldwork program provided an important cultural context, and we provided them an understanding of the science behind what we are doing.

“The community were interested in what we were collecting and why, and obviously also in ensuring that we were culturally sensitive when carrying out our fieldwork.

“AECOM was provided with an alternative appreciation of the landscape beyond a typical scientific investigation.”

An archaeologist from RPS and Aboriginal Elders undertook heritage clearance of individual drilling locations before moving vehicles and machinery and disturbing the ground.

Video production crew captured footage of the site and other features of interest to the local community, and will share this footage in due course.

AECOM’s workforce and subcontractors undertook compulsory cultural heritage awareness inductions.

Malcolm (Tiger) McKenzie, co-Chair of the Economic Working Group, said the 7-week period was a success, and key to building relationships between local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

“One of the greatest things I saw was the relationship between the Viliwarinha people and the workers who did the drilling. It was fantastic to see – I want to see more of it!” Tiger said.

“Some young people were employed for the first time. Even though this was a short period, it proves to young Aboriginal people if you do your schooling and training, there are jobs out there for you.

“Young and older, more experienced, people were working alongside. It was like a mentor process as they sat down together and talked through things.”

Tiger is hopeful the facility will boost employment for the local Aboriginal community.

“If the new facility goes ahead, there will be 45 new jobs. I can see Aboriginal people having many opportunities to participate. It would be great news all around,” Tiger said.

“The money that is being invested will hopefully get more Aboriginal people in my area working. It is about building relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

“It is promising to see the local community working with the government from the ground up and communicating together for the best outcomes.”

Bruce Wilson, Principal Advisor to the National Radioactive Waste Management Taskforce, was positive about the engagement and future opportunities that would come alongside the Facility.

“The Federal Government has made a strong commitment to involve the local aboriginal community in the site characterisation works for the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility,” Wilson said.

“The continuous strong involvement of this community is very important. We will them in the siting process and, if the facility proceeds here, the operational phase over several hundred years.

“This is potentially just the start of an ongoing and mutually beneficial relationship.”

To watch the video showing the studies at Wallerberdina Station and for more project information: www.radioactivewaste.gov.au

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