

Investigating mining's social values

Research to map the social landscape of the minerals industry will help inform the sector's efforts towards a socially sustainable future.

The Australian minerals industry has become progressively concerned with sustainable development and social values. There is now an explicit acknowledgement that a social licence to operate is an essential complement to a regulatory licence to mine.

The increased focus on the social dimension has highlighted the complexity of the industry's stakeholders, and the relationships and issues involved. CSIRO researchers are aiming to develop an overview of key social issues within the minerals industry.

The initial phase of their project involved a literature review, focusing on material published after the 2002 Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development (MMSD) report 'Breaking new ground'.

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Project leader, CSIRO Minerals research fellow Dr Fiona Solomon, says the MMSD report provided a real mind-shift for the minerals industry. 'This report sets a useful benchmark as an initial map of the territory and provides a starting point for examining change over the past five years.'

The project team also conducted two workshops and a colloquium with industry, researchers and other stakeholders to discuss contemporary issues and challenges.

'At the final colloquium, the



The Ranger Uranium Mine, NT, has been the subject of extended debate over its impact on local communities and the surrounding landscape. Paul Peter/CSIRO Land and Water

current mining boom and its social implications for employees, women, families and communities attracted much discussion,' says Dr Solomon.

The key issues raised will be the focus of the final phase of the project, which will involve the use of conceptual mapping tools to draw all the information together.

'Mapping tools are used extensively in the mining industry and have long been acknowledged for their ability to summarise information and highlight key relationships,' explains Dr Solomon.

'Once this phase is complete, we aim to identify knowledge gaps, explore the implications for the minerals industry, and identify pathways for future action.'

The project is due to be completed in April 2007.

• Marina Johnson

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