



Misiman women and children who wash in local streams drawing from the mining area have complained of sores, itchiness and irritations. Some streams have been totally closed by sediment. Techa Beaumont, Mineral Policy Institute.

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for polluting the oceans and poisoning local communities. The practice is not permitted in many countries, including Australia and Canada.

Catherine Coumans of MiningWatch Canada said ‘This practice is illegal in Canada. Placer’s other waste disposal method in PNG, into a river at Porgera, is also illegal in Canada.’

‘Once again Placer Dome is a source of shame in Canada for the failure to protect environments and communities abroad. We have long denounced Placer Dome’s waste disposal in the sea at Misima,’ she said.

A cyanide spill into the ocean on 7 August this year, admitted by the company, resulted in fish kills off the island’s coast and redirected public attention to the remote island. Investigations conducted by the Mineral Policy Institute suggest the incident may have been directly related to fast-tracking the deconstruction of tailings facilities prior to decommissioning cyanide tanks, and recommended investigation into the incident.

According to MPI, Placer’s PNG company offered the equivalent of less than one Australian dollar per person to locals impacted by the spill, while weeks later, communities around Misima and surrounding islands continued to find dead fish. There were reports of a whale floating onto the shore and locals are apparently still too frightened to fish or swim in the oceans.

## Misima mine damage raises concerns

Canadian-based resources company Placer Dome is drawing international attention for the impact of its gold and silver mine on the tiny Papua New Guinean island of Misima.

As Placer Dome, which controls 80% of the joint venture in Papua New Guinea, prepares to decommission its operations, indigenous landowners have sent out a plea for support to have the company called to account for the mine’s environmental and community effects. Representatives of the landowners recently travelled to the capital, Port Moresby, to meet with their Prime Minister and raise the concerns of their people.

The Mineral Policy Institute (Australia), MiningWatch Canada and the NGO Environmental Watch Group (PNG) have assessed and condemned Placer Dome’s

responsibility at the mine site, reporting that the company is seeking to ‘cut and run’ from the mine while the Governor of the local Province has refused to sign off on the mine closure plan due to concern over unresolved social, environmental and economic issues.

According to the Mineral Policy Institute, who have been monitoring the company’s activity, the plan was also completed without properly consulting the representative landowner associations who were party to the original mine agreement, and local level and provincial government officials input was not integrated into the closure plan.

Techa Beaumont of the Mineral Policy Institute (MPI) recently visited Misima to independently assess the problems and reports that the mine operates at one of the central mountains of the small island, with

mine pits and waste dumps located at the headway of creeks and rivers providing most of the island population’s water supplies. The mine has apparently disturbed about one-third of the island, with creeks and rivers along the south side of the island and adjacent fringing reef now severely affected by mine sediments and pollutants.

‘The negative impacts of this mine are devastating,’ she said. ‘Much of the local water supplies have been destroyed or polluted. Large villages on the island are already experiencing shortages, and the disruption to the limited land and water resources will pose serious problems for these people’s basic needs.’

The mine uses the controversial practice of ocean dumping (submarine tailings disposal) also utilised by a Newmont mine in Buyat Bay, Indonesia, recently shut down

‘These companies do not tell us the truth. We read what happens in other places, and the mining company deny all the pollution and problems until the people do independent tests. Are these dead fish from the cyanide or from their other dumping of wastes into the oceans? We do not know, but we now know that we cannot always trust what the company says’ said Stanley Niga, chairman of landowners representative group, Misima Towo Siung Association.

Following community unrest, the company set up an association run by its own employee to represent Misima’s landowners. Local communities, however, are highly critical of the capacity of a Placer employee to adequately represent their interests to the company.

Landowners have issued a statement and set of demands addressing their concerns to both the company and the national government, which includes a request to release all

reports on this incident and a commitment to an independent review of the mine closure plans and ongoing environment impacts.<sup>1</sup>

Stewart Serawe of the Environmental Watch Group, in PNG said, ‘The men and women of Misima and other mine sites are dependent upon their lands for their future. Mining companies need to respect their rights, including their customary relationships to their land, and their

future reliance upon that land for their survival.’

When contacted, Pat Sankey, Misima Mine’s Operations Manager said that a statement was being prepared in relation to MPI’s claims. Unable to formally comment until then, Mr Sankey said only that MPI’s assertions were unrepresentative, and that Ms Beamont had not contacted the Mines staff for discussion or a mine visit on her recent unannounced trip.

<sup>1</sup> These are available on the internet at [www.mpi.org.au](http://www.mpi.org.au)

## Indigenous managers for dugong and turtle harvests

With new concerns over excessive traditional hunting of dugongs and turtles in the Torres Strait, an *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* assessment will be undertaken of their harvest, and a \$3.8 million federal contract has been signed with the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), through the Tropical Savannas Cooperative Research Centre, to develop community-driven approaches to sustainable management of the animals.

A recently published report prepared for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority by dugong expert Dr Helene Marsh claims that the current harvest of dugongs, estimated at 1000 each year, by traditional inhabitants in Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) is threatening populations and suggests 100 to 200 dugongs annually is more sustainable.

The NAILSMA project commences in 2005 and aims to have traditional owners from the Kimberley, Top End of the Northern Territory, southern Gulf of Carpentaria, Cape York and the Torres Strait regions collaborate on and implement fishing management approaches.

‘We want local people to take control and accept responsibility for looking after the dugong and turtle populations they depend on,’ said Joe Morrison, Coordinator of NAILSMA.

‘At stake are the sustainable livelihoods of Indigenous people, just as much as biodiversity outcomes. How can we achieve both? The answer surely has to be one driven by Indigenous people, who will be the major beneficiaries from the

sustainable management of these animals,’ said Morrison.

Scientific research will continue to improve understandings of the complex life histories of the turtles and dugongs, but to help ensure the survival of their populations the project will be driven by Indigenous people who hold large bodies of knowledge about the species.

The project’s Technical Reference Group will include scientists, government and natural resource management agencies supporting traditional owners.

NAILSMA was developed by the Kimberley Land Council, Northern Land Council and Balkanu Cape York

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Development Corporation in response to the increasing need to have effective communication to support community-driven management action by traditional owners across the tropics of northern Australia.



Indigenous communities will be supported in developing sustainable takes of dugong.  
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority