



ELSEVIER



www.elsevierhealth.com/journals/jinf

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Comment on “*Vibrio vulnificus* and *V. parahaemolyticus* necrotising fasciitis in fishermen visiting an estuarine tropical northern Australia location”^{*}

Dear Editor

The case report by A. Ralph and B.J. Currie on a rare tropical *Vibrio* in the Northern Territory (*Vibrio vulnificus* and *V. parahaemolyticus* Necrotising Fasciitis in Fishermen Visiting an Estuarine Tropical Northern Australia Location, August 2006) infers a connection between the cases and alleged heavy metal contamination caused by the operations of McArthur River Mining (MRM). This inference cannot be substantiated.

The critical fact is that after 14 years of analysis, there has been no heavy metal pollution of the McArthur River or the Gulf environments by MRM. The company upholds the highest standards of environmental protection and monitors every potential point of impact in cooperation with scientists from the Environmental Analytical Chemistry Unit of Charles Darwin University.

This track record for safe operations was recognised through the Northern Territory Environment Protection Agency’s Assessment Report 51 (February 2006) which stated: “The EPA is satisfied with the findings of these scientific studies and acknowledges that there is no scientific evidence to date of impact from the mine in the estuarine reaches of the river or in the Gulf, excluding the immediate vicinity of Bing Bong [loading facility].”

Substantial information on the results of MRMs regular site environmental monitoring and annual marine monitoring program is publicly available through the website (www.mcarthurriver.com.au). It is contained within both Fact Sheets on the recently approved open pit development and a series of environmental assessment documents – the Draft Environmental Impact Study (August 2005), EIS Supplement (December 2005), and Public Environmental Report (July 2006).

It is very disappointing the authors of the case report submitted the article for publication without checking this

publicly available information or requesting further relevant data from MRM.

The actual monitoring data contradict key factual inaccuracies in the article as zinc, lead and copper levels recorded in the McArthur River are within the acceptable range under ANZECC Water Quality Guidelines.

The article also fails to take into consideration key geological and geographical influences.

Water quality is potentially impacted by the naturally occurring high levels of mineralisation within the region. Substantial natural outcrops of minerals are evident within the landscape. Water quality is also impacted by pollution caused by the influx of sewerage and activities around the town of Borroloola and generated by the seasonal increase in boats and fisherman touring the area.

It is also critical to note that in two of the three cases studied in the article, the patients were located on the Wearyn River and Limmen Bright River. Both these rivers are independent of the McArthur River catchment with no tributaries connecting these waterways.

MRM takes its environmental obligations extremely seriously. The matters commented upon in the article are sensitive and given the inferences drawn, could be highly damaging to MRM.

We have spoken with the authors and shared the actual MRM environmental monitoring data with them. Based on these discussions, we acknowledge there is regional concern for the *Vibrio* cases which warrants further investigation.

MRM, as a stakeholder in the Gulf region, is cooperating in this further study. However, any suggestion this issue has been caused by the mine is wrong.

Yours faithfully

Brian Hearne

McArthur River Mining Pty Ltd, PO Box 36821, Winnellie NT 0821, Australia

E-mail addresses: bhearne@xstratazinc.com.au,
<http://www.xstrata.com>

Accepted 23 December 2006

^{*} DOI of original article: 10.1016/j.jinf.2006.06.015.

^{*} Tel.: +61 88975 8179; fax: +61 88975 8170.