

## PEAK 1998 Annual Report

The Porgera Environmental Advisory Komiti (PEAK) held three meetings in 1998. In March and November, PEAK met in Port Moresby, while in August the meeting was held in Porgera and a lower Strickland river visit was made to Lake Murray and Nomad to meet with local communities and discuss their concerns.

### **Membership**

The membership of PEAK was increased in 1998 so as to provide broader input and expertise to the committee's deliberations.

The new members are :

Gerard Saleu is a Research Fellow at the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research. The Institute is an independent medical research organisation specialising in tropical diseases. Gerard is a member of PEAK and has expertise in tropical diseases.

Michael Kiap is a lecturer in Chemical Technology at the Department of Applied Science of the Papua New Guinea University of Technology. Michael is a member of PEAK and has, among others, expertise in water chemistry.

Dr. Roland Seib is a research fellow at the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-economic Services. As an ecumenical research institute it is designed to help the churches speak more clearly about the needs of people in Melanesia. A graduate in political science, Roland specialises in economic and social issues.

Owing to staffing changes, the PNG non-government organisation, the Individual and Community Rights Advocacy Forum (ICRAF) was unable to provide a representative to attend PEAK meetings in 1998.

### **Major issues**

PEAK's deliberations in 1998 remained primarily focussed on the riverine disposal of tailing and waste rock by the mine and the impact of this material on the environment and the communities living adjacent to and downstream of the mine.

### **CSIRO Review Recommendations**

The PJV reported to PEAK on its progress in implementing the recommendations of the CSIRO review into the mine's riverine tailing disposal. Action highlights include :

- The upgrading of river monitoring stations was completed and control sites established. These stations are on the Ok Om and Upper Lagaip rivers, which are not affected by the mine's activities, to improve the quality of the dataset for scientific interpretation;
- A consultant report on sediment deposition on the Strickland River floodplain was completed, revealing elevated metals concentrations. Further analysis is being undertaken to assess what proportion, if any, of the metals were mine derived;
- The commencement of a review of alternative methods of tailing and waste rock disposal;
- A visit by PEAK members to Lake Murray and the Strickland River villages to discuss concerns with the local people in relation to perceived mine impacts;
- A screening level risk assessment by Parametrix confirmed that little, if any, risk to humans, fish or wildlife exists as a result of mine activities. Further detailed studies are under consideration;
- Improvement of annual reporting with more emphasis on detected trends; and
- Improvement in staffing of department and statistical handling of data.

### **Food safety**

PEAK has recommended further studies of human foodstuffs, particularly fish and sago, so as to ensure food safety. These studies will be completed in 1999.

### **Gold panning health risks**

PEAK and the PJV are concerned about the health risks to the people illegally panning for gold in the creek immediately below the Porgera mine's tailing outlet and the Anawe erodable dump. Gold panning at this site is dangerous because of

- the danger of falling rocks;
- the potential effects of long term exposure of people working in undiluted but neutralised tailing; and
- illegal and unsafe use of mercury.

PEAK has recommended that the PJV consider additional measures for the protection of the gold panners health, and increasing their awareness of the risks involved.

### **Water quality testing**

PEAK has had discussions with the Secretary of the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) over community concerns about the reliability of water quality measurements taken by the PJV and its consultants. DEC has given an undertaking to independently measure water quality in 1999.

### **Future plans**

PEAK will meet in April (Port Moresby) and in October (Pogera) in 1999. It is envisaged that sub-committees of PEAK will hold interim meetings, including visits to the communities down-river from the mine.