

## **Government lets ERA off the hook for Kakadu leak**

26 SEPTEMBER 2002

The Traditional Owners of the Ranger uranium mine, the Mirarr People, today expressed their profound disappointment that the Commonwealth Government has again refused to sanction Kakadu uranium miner ERA for environmental mismanagement.

Late today the Federal Environment Minister, Dr David Kemp, released a report on the allegations of a former ERA employee - Mr Geoffrey Kyle - that the company's environmental management at the Ranger mine was seriously deficient.

"This report is nothing short of a whitewash from the Commonwealth Office of the Supervising Scientist," said Executive Officer of Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, Mr Andy Ralph.

"This year has seen elevated levels of uranium at Jabiluka and Ranger, delayed reporting at Jabiluka, incorrect stockpiling at Ranger and in every case the OSS has prepared a flimsy defence of the mining company's inadequacies. We contend that the regulator has been captured by industry."

Mr Kyle's allegations, broadcast by the ABC TV 7.30 Report in April, detailed unacceptably high levels of uranium within the surrounding Kakadu National Park and a subsequent cover-up, the alteration of company records and substandard laboratory practices at Ranger.

Mr Ralph said it is significant that the OSS report cites "deficiencies", "inconsistent or incorrect analyses" on ERA's part, acknowledges that contaminant loads need to be factored into future monitoring and questions whether or not uncontrolled discharges from the tailings dam region should continue. He said it was ironic that the OSS should then proceed to whitewash ERA's clear environmental mismanagement.

One of the more serious allegations made by Mr Kyle was that in 1997 he recorded a concentration of uranium in Kakadu National Park downstream of Ranger exceeding the level allowable in the Ranger Project Area. Mr Kyle said that company records were altered to remove this recording.

"The OSS does not dispute that this level was recorded in the national park. If this level had been properly registered inside the Ranger Project Area this would have shut the mine down. The OSS states that there is no evidence that ERA reanalysed the sample collected by Mr Kyle before ERA changed the value he entered in the database. It is therefore outrageous for the OSS not to recommend sanctions," Mr Ralph said.

Hearings for a Senate inquiry into the Kakadu uranium operations of ERA (68% owned by Rio Tinto) commence in Darwin next Monday, 30 September.