

Kakadu Traditional Owners call for Rio action on Jabiluka

29 APRIL 2003

The Traditional Owners of the Jabiluka uranium mine area in Kakadu National Park, the Mirarr People, today reiterated their call on mining giant Rio Tinto to give legal effect to commitments by chairperson Sir Robert Wilson that Jabiluka would not be developed without Mirarr consent. The call follows reports today that Rio subsidiary Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) will not be drawn into signing any contract enforcing Aboriginal authority over Jabiluka.

Representing the Mirarr, Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation has released a statement from Senior Traditional Owner Ms Yvonne Margarula, who has spearheaded the long-running Mirarr international campaign to oppose mining at Jabiluka. Ms Margarula's statement was read by representatives of Gundjeihmi to both the London annual general meeting of Rio Tinto on 17 April and ERA's AGM held in Sydney yesterday. The statement in full reads:

"The Mirarr People have fought against uranium mining in Kakadu for two generations. My father fought against the Ranger mine and today, with my sisters and other Mirarr, we are fighting against the Jabiluka mine. Jabiluka threatens to destroy our sacred sites, our connection to country, our life. Rio Tinto has promised that it will not mine Jabiluka unless the Mirarr say yes; we want Rio Tinto and ERA to put that promise in writing. Rio Tinto has promised that it will clean up Jabiluka; we want Rio Tinto and ERA to put the uranium they took from Jabiluka and put it back down the hole, we want them to do this during this dry season. Until Rio Tinto and ERA do these things the Mirarr will not believe the company's words. We will continue to fight to protect our country and our culture."

Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation executive officer, Andy Ralph, said it is now almost three (3) years since Rio acquired Jabiluka and that time has now run out for the company. *"Rio took on Jabiluka in August 2000, it's now well past midnight and there is still no progress on the ground in Kakadu."*

Mr Ralph highlighted the apparent divergence in policy between ERA and its majority owner (68.4%) Rio Tinto. *"Rio needs to get its house in order. We have a situation where clear commitments from the highest levels of Rio Tinto are today being contradicted by senior management at ERA. To commit the company to an improved relationship with Traditional Owners, Rio/ERA must now backfill the mineralised ore at Jabiluka and enter into a binding commitment to not develop the mine without Mirarr consent"* Mr Ralph said.

Rio Tinto Australia will hold its annual general meeting in Perth this Thursday, 1 May.