



# Traditional owners to scrutinise mine plan

## Resources

**Angela Macdonald-Smith**

The traditional owners of the Ranger uranium mine will look carefully at a draft environmental impact statement for an underground expansion lodged by Energy Resources of Australia on Friday, says Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation chief executive Justin O'Brien.

He said the group, which represents the Mirarr people, would "weigh up the cultural, social and environmental considerations that will bring to bear on our decision-making".

Rio Tinto-controlled ERA has pressed ahead with the expansion of the mine, near Kakadu, despite heightened fears among traditional owners about safety and health since a radioactive leak at the site late last year.

Chief executive Andrea Sutton said the company would "continue to seek their support" for the Ranger 3 Deeps project, which could start producing ore in late 2015.

"We are going to work as closely as they wish with regards to reviewing the EIS and helping them gain a greater understanding of the Ranger 3 Deeps project and opportunity," Ms Sutton said.

Mr O'Brien said the lodging of the draft environmental impact statement came at a time when ERA's relationship with the traditional owners was "very good" thanks to the process safety system at Ranger, near the Jabiru township.

"Notwithstanding that improved relationship, this proposal will be judged on its own merits," he said.

But concerns over safety and

health were still high since a leach tank accident last December and due to "the history of leaks and spills and accidents over many decades".

ERA does not technically need the backing of the Mirarr traditional owners for the mine but, Ms Sutton said, "we certainly are seeking their support".

Mr O'Brien said the economic dependence of Jabiru and the Mirarr people on Ranger, as well as cultural considerations would come into play in the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation's decision, alongside the environmental matters.

PHOTO: AGE