

Rio rhetoric empty so long as Kakadu threatened

18 APRIL 2002

The Traditional Owners of the Ranger and Jabiluka areas in Kakadu National Park, the Mirarr People, today reiterated their call for mining giant Rio Tinto to immediately rehabilitate the Jabiluka mine site and incorporate the land into the surrounding national park. The call from the Mirarr comes as Rio conducts its Australian annual general meeting in Melbourne today.

Representing the Mirarr, Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation released a statement from Mirarr Senior Traditional Owner Ms Yvonne Margarula. Ms Margarula's statement was first read to the London AGM of Rio on 11 April and again at the Sydney AGM of Rio subsidiary Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) on 15 April. The statement, in part, reads:

"The Mirarr People still say no to Jabiluka mine! All the Mirarr are together; we are united against any more uranium mining on Mirarr country. No amount of money, no amount of political pressure, no backroom deals, no bribery or blackmail will make us change our mind. We cannot change the law and the law is that we protect our sacred sites."

Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation executive officer, Andy Ralph, said Rio's commitment to not developing Jabiluka within the next decade offers no comfort to Mirarr Traditional Owners.

"Jabiluka is dead - let's bury it," Mr Ralph said.

"It is completely unacceptable that this significant threat to Mirarr culture and Kakadu's environment would continue for such an extended period. Rio Tinto needs to know that Aboriginal and community opposition to Jabiluka will persist, that Kakadu is an albatross around its neck and that the Jabiluka site needs immediate rehabilitation. Anything less gives the lie to Rio's feel-good rhetoric about developing respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples."

Mr Ralph said that Traditional Owners were especially concerned at news earlier this year that uranium was detected at levels five (5) times higher downstream of the Jabiluka mine site than the upstream background, indicating that even while in 'care and maintenance' mode, Jabiluka threatens Kakadu's cultural and environmental integrity.