

## **Rio Tinto flunks its own test on Aboriginal rights**

27 APRIL 2001

Today's annual general meeting of Rio Tinto Australia was marred by the controversial Jabiluka uranium mine. The Senior Traditional owner of the Mirarr Clan, Yvonne Margarula and Mirarr spokesperson Jacqui Katona joined with environmentalists in protesting against Rio's continuing association with Jabiluka.

Rio Tinto is the majority shareholder of Energy Resources of Australia (ERA), the beleaguered owner and operator of the Ranger and Jabiluka uranium mines. The Mirarr are the traditional owners of Ranger and Jabiluka, both surrounded by Kakadu National Park.

Ms Katona said the Mirarr remain disappointed at the lack of good faith shown by Rio Tinto, which has recently indicated it would not develop Jabiluka in the short-term.

"There is nothing new in Rio's statements about Jabiluka. This is the very commitment given by ERA two years ago, then described as sequential mining, to not develop Jabiluka while Ranger was in full production," Ms Katona said.

"There has been no moratorium declared on the development of Jabiluka, despite suggestions otherwise. As far as Rio is concerned Jabiluka is all systems go and is today in standby mode."

Ms Katona said recent moves by ERA to extend the Ranger mining agreement do not augur well for the company's relationship with traditional owners.

"Rio's good faith is in question when it extends the life of the Ranger mine by five years without consulting traditional owners and without an adequate rehabilitation plan. They are pre-empting the outcome of arbitration.

"If Rio Tinto is serious at meeting the test it has set itself regarding working constructively with Indigenous communities it should immediately take steps to rehabilitate the Jabiluka site.

"This a hostage situation so long as there is threat hanging over Aboriginal people that a sacred site will be desecrated," Ms Katona concluded.