

# GUNDJEIHMI

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



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**Media Statement September 6 2024**

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## **Mirarr call on Welsh and Wyatt for apology**

Recent commentary and attempted influence from non-Mirarr Aboriginal people advocating mining at Jabiluka have angered Mirarr Traditional Owners. Mirarr believe comments from Bundjalung man Warren Mundine along with revelations of the agendas of outgoing ERA CEO Brad Welsh and Independent Director Ken Wyatt AM are disrespectful and aim to undermine the cultural authority of Mirarr as Traditional Owners.

Mundine and other First Nations commentators appear to disrespect the importance of Indigenous heritage in their hunger to be at the table of business and development. Mundine says Mirarr would get “a seat at the table in regional, national and global decisions that impact their lands and the world” if only we agreed to mining. This is naïve. Mining companies, governments and others who seek to exploit Aboriginal land do not invite First Nations representatives - including Mundine – to the table voluntarily. We are invited when we establish our rights on our own country. This is why Mirarr have commanded the attention of mining companies for decades. We have not joined the cheer squad for big business, we are taken seriously because we have never wavered from our clear responsibility to protect country and culture.

When ERA CEO Brad Welsh went to Canberra in June this year with the former Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt AM, they claimed to be advocating for the protection of the right to veto mining at Jabiluka on Mirarr country. They seemed to suggest that a mining lease is an ideal way to protect Indigenous rights.

Mr Welsh and Mr Wyatt have also repeatedly claimed that they did not know how Mirarr felt about a further mining lease. This is hard for us to believe as Mirarr opposition to mining at Jabiluka is a well established matter of public record and we have issued no less than 13 media statements over the previous twelve months confirming no support for the lease extension. We believe both men understood their actions in Canberra were against all cultural protocol especially when suggesting they knew best how to protect Mirarr country.

Mirarr remind Brad Welsh and Ken Wyatt that they have no business claiming to speak for Mirarr country and seek a formal apology for this inappropriate behaviour. In his statement filed in Court, which has been widely quoted in the Australian Financial Review recently, Mr Welsh said he and Mr Wyatt spoke about what was best for Mirarr and claimed they made no mention of mining at all in their meetings in Canberra.

Mirarr Traditional Owner Corben Mudjandi said today: “They seem to think a national park is much worse for the rights of Aboriginal people than a mining lease. We have lived for decades with the impacts of both and do not agree that a mining lease is better than a national park. We have experience with businesses ourselves and mining is not the only option for economic development”

Senior Mirarr Traditional Owner Yvonne Margarula said:

“Our message to both Brad Welsh and Ken Wyatt is to remember who you work for and stop talking about what’s best on someone else’s country. Warren Mundine acknowledged the most fundamental right of all when he said he respects our right to make decisions for our country. Even though he also suggested that Mirarr don’t know what’s best for our community at least he understands our right to speak for our own country. We now call on Brad Welsh and Ken Wyatt to apologise for speaking about Mirarr country in the way they did. We ask them to respect our right to speak for Mirarr country as we respect their right to speak for theirs.”

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**For background or photos contact: Kirsten Blair 0412 853 641**