



## Jabiluka's sacred power 'must never be disturbed'

By **LINDSAY MURDOCH**  
**JABIRU**

IN THE Dreaming of the Mirarr people of Kakadu, a sacred, dangerous power called the Djang is unleashed when disturbed on their land.

Senior traditional leader Yvonne Margarula says her late father Toby Gangale warned the Australian government in the late 1970s the Djang "might kill all over the world" if disturbed at Ranger, a uranium mine that was built in Kakadu National Park despite opposition from traditional owners.

"No one listened," she said.

Now Ms Margarula says her people are "deeply saddened" that uranium from their land at Ranger has been exported over more than 30 years to Japanese nuclear power companies, including one operating the stricken Fukushima plant.

The Mirarr have declared they want the multibillion-dollar Jabiluka uranium deposit on their land to remain undeveloped and be incorporated into the world heritage-listed Kakadu National Park.

Ms Margarula and 30 other adults and about 40 children in her clan could be among Australia's richest people if they allowed Energy Resources of

Australia (ERA) to develop Jabiluka, which was halted in 1998 after an eight-month blockade by 5000 protesters.

The 72-square-kilometre mineral lease site containing 141,640 tonnes of uranium is one of the world's largest known undeveloped uranium deposits.

ERA, which is 68 per cent owned by Rio Tinto, is eager to mine the high-grade deposit worth \$18.5 billion at current spot prices.

In a rare interview in Jabiru, a town near the Ranger mine and Jabiluka deposit, Ms Margarula told *The Age* she never wants to see Jabiluka disturbed.

"I am really happy about [the prospect of] it becoming part of the national park so my nephews and nieces can look after the country and I will never again see big clouds of smoke and dust on the other side of the hill while the rocks, the escarpments are destroyed," she said.

In a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon this week, Ms Margarula said it was "with great sadness" the Mirarr learned of the suffering of the Japanese people following the March 11 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear emergency.

"I am writing to you to convey our solidarity and support with all those people across the world who see in the events at Fukushima a dire warning of the risks posed by the nuclear industry," Ms Margarula wrote.

"This is an industry that we have never supported in the past and that we want no part of into the future," she wrote.

"We are all diminished by the awful events now unfolding at Fukushima . . . I urge you to consider our viewpoint in your deliberations with governments in relation to the Fukushima emergency and the nuclear industry in general."

Ms Margarula, a shy, softly spoken elder, told *The Age* her people had decided they wanted the federal government to support the incorporation of Jabiluka into Kakadu as it has for another uranium mining area at Koongarra, near the world famous Nourlangie Rock.

Jeffery Lee, the sole member of the Djok clan and traditional custodian of the land, offered Koongarra to the government, shunning the chance to become a billionaire, saying he is happy to work there as a park ranger.



Mirarr elder Yvonne Margarula says her people are "deeply saddened" uranium from their land has been exported to Japanese nuclear power companies.



## Forget the billions, return Jabiluka site to Kakadu, say traditional owners

### Lindsay Murdoch

JABIRU

ABORIGINAL traditional owners have declared they want the multibillion-dollar Jabiluka uranium deposit to remain undeveloped and be incorporated into Kakadu National Park.

A senior traditional owner, Yvonne Margarula, says her Mirarr people are "deeply saddened" that for more than 30 years uranium that should never have been disturbed on their land at the Ranger mine in the Northern Territory has been exported to Japan to be used by nuclear power companies, including at the stricken Fukushima plant, which was heavily damaged by the tsunami last month and has been leaking radiation.

Ms Margarula told the *Herald* that in the Mirarr people's Dreaming a sacred dangerous power called Djang was unleashed when it was disturbed on their land.

She said her late father, Toby Gangale, warned the Australian government in the late 1970s that Djang "might kill all over the world" if disturbed at Ranger, which was built despite opposition from traditional owners.

"No one listened to him," she said.

Ms Margarula and 70 others in her clan could be among Australia's richest people if they allowed

Energy Resources of Australia to develop Jabiluka, which was halted in 1998 after an eight-month blockade by 5000 protesters.

The 72 square kilometre mineral lease containing 141,640 tonnes of uranium is one of the world's largest undeveloped uranium deposits. ERA, 68 per cent owned by Rio Tinto, is eager to mine the high grade deposit worth \$18.5 billion.

Speaking in Jabiru, a town near the Ranger mine and Jabiluka deposit, both on land owned by the Mirarr people, Ms Margarula said Jabiluka is a sacred place and she never wanted to see it disturbed.

In a letter to the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, this week, Ms Margarula said it was "with great sadness" the Mirarr people learnt of the suffering of the Japanese people following the earthquake and tsunami.

Ms Margarula told Mr Ban her people had been blocked from opposing the export of uranium from their land to Japan.

"Given the long history between Japanese nuclear companies and Australian uranium mines, it is likely that the radiation problems at Fukushima are, in part at least, fuelled by uranium derived from our traditional lands," she wrote.

Ms Margarula, a shy, softly spoken elder, said her people had decided they wanted the federal government to support the incorporation of the Jabiluka site into the Kakadu park, as it had for another uranium mining area at Koongarra, near the renowned Nourlangie Rock.

That decision angered the French energy group Areva, which holds the mineral lease over the 12 square kilometre site that contains 14,000 tonnes of uranium worth billions of dollars. Jeffery Lee, the sole member of the Djok clan, offered Koongarra to the government, shunning the chance to become a billionaire, saying he is happy to work as a ranger protecting the land.

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Warned about the wrath of Djang ... Yvonne Margarula, one of the traditional owners from the Mirarr people, in front of an image of her father, Toby Gangale. Photo: Glenn Campbell