

Storm clouds gather for Kakadu uranium miner

Traditional Owners refused Jabiluka access for inspection

30 OCTOBER 2001

The Mirarr people, the Traditional Owners of the Jabiluka uranium mine area in Kakadu, have today joined with key environment groups in a call to halt company plans for the disposal of contaminated water at the controversial mine site.

The call follows the refusal by uranium miner Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) to allow a requested pre-wet season site inspection. ERA has withheld access approval for representatives of the Mirarr and key national and regional environment groups who were scheduled to visit the Jabiluka site today to inspect a new water management system based on land irrigation of mine water.

"Traditional Owners have serious concerns about water management on site," said Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation Executive Officer Andy Ralph. "ERA is set to commence irrigating the water on site, increasing the contaminated area by 50%. The coming wet season will severely test an already failing water management system at Jabiluka.

"The company's refusal to allow us to visit the site today has only heightened our concerns and we are calling for all hazards on site to be neutralized and for the site to be fully rehabilitated," Mr Ralph said.

Construction at Jabiluka ceased in September 1999 as a result of Traditional Owner and community opposition to the mine and record low uranium prices. The mine continues to be the focus of opposition and protest and Traditional Owners and environment groups have called for ERA's majority owner, Rio Tinto, to actively support rehabilitation of the Jabiluka mine site.

"Today's development is further proof that ERA is shifting the goalposts in terms of water management at Jabiluka," said Australian Conservation Foundation campaigner Dave Sweeney. "In the original Environmental Impact Statement the company stated all contaminated water will be contained on-site. ERA is now resorting to irrigation to dispose of water contaminated with uranium and other materials. The real rains haven't even started but there are serious storm clouds heading in ERA's direction."