

Troubled Rio Tinto must rehabilitate Jabiluka

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The Senior Traditional Owner of the Mirarr People of Kakadu National Park, Yvonne Margarula, today reaffirmed her opposition to the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine, following the release of a transcript of interview on BBC World with Rio Tinto Chairman, Sir Robert Wilson.

Speaking on behalf of the mining giant - which owns 68% of Kakadu uranium miner Energy Resources of Australia - Sir Robert Wilson said there would not be development at Jabiluka without Mirarr consent and that rehabilitation works involving the 'plugging' of the existing 1.2 km underground mine tunnel is being considered by the company.

Ms Margarula reiterated her outright opposition to the Jabiluka development.

"It doesn't matter how many times they ask, I'm not going to agree to the Djabulukgu [Jabiluka] mine, for whatever reason they want from it, money or whatever else. Mining ruins the land. Just like the way the Ranger mine has destroyed the land. My mind is firmly set. I'm not going to allow them to destroy any more of my land," Ms Margarula said.

Executive officer of Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, Andy Ralph, said that as consent for Jabiluka will never be forthcoming, Rio must immediately commence rehabilitation of the site.

"So long as the threat of Jabiluka hangs over the Mirarr, Rio Tinto's commitments to sustainability and community consultation are meaningless and, indeed, contemptuous. The Mirarr will never support the Jabiluka mine and according to Sir Robert Wilson this means there will never be a Jabiluka mine, therefore the project site must be rehabilitated and the land incorporated into Kakadu National Park.

"Sir Robert has incorrectly stated that there has been no damage to sacred sites at Jabiluka. For the record, the Mirarr Traditional Owners have issued numerous specific media statements on the desecration of sacred sites at Jabiluka and unsuccessfully sought a Northern Territory Supreme Court injunction against the construction of the mine tunnel in July 1998, arguing that a sacred site would be desecrated."

Jabiluka has been the subject of persistent questioning and protest at the current World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, where Rio Tinto has a delegation. Representatives of Australian and international environment groups have scheduled a meeting with senior representatives in the Rio delegation in order to emphasise the global opposition to Jabiluka.

Hearings for an Australian Senate inquiry into Rio Tinto's Kakadu uranium operations commence on 30 September.