

Senior Traditional Owner In Court Today

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The Yvonne Margarula criminal trespass hearing continues today in Jabiru. Ms Margarula is the Senior Traditional Owner for the Mirrar estate and is unequivocally opposed to the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine being developed on Mirrar land. She was arrested and charged on May 19 for trespassing on her traditional country near the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine site.

The case has potentially far reaching implications for the access rights of traditional owners and has attracted international attention.

The case was adjourned yesterday after the prosecution opposed the tendering of a disputed 1982 agreement which has so far allowed the mine to proceed. The Mirrar completely reject the legitimacy of this agreement but do not oppose it being used for the defence of criminal charges against Ms Margarula and three other Aboriginal people accused of trespass. The Court is seeking a response from the uranium mining giant Energy Resources of Australia before making a decision on the tendering of the agreement.

A threatened intervention into the case from Northern Territory Chief Minister Shane Stone has not yet eventuated after Ms Margarula's lawyer assured the Court that Constitutional matters would not form a key plank in the defence.

"These charges make a farce of land rights in the Northern Territory. This case demonstrates that ERA and the government will do everything possible to extinguish the enjoyment and exercise of Aboriginal rights - even in the case of peaceful protest.

Ms Margarula and her co-defendant Jacqui Katona are expected to make a statement at the close of today's proceedings.