

ERA Set to Desecrate World Heritage Site

13 May 1999

Jabiluka mining company, Energy Resources of Australia, today announced it will desecrate the Boyweg-Almudj Sacred Site Complex near the Jabiluka minesite on May 22, 1999. The desecration will occur despite ongoing pleas for construction to stop by the Northern Land Council, UNESCO and the Jabiluka Traditional Owners and Custodians.

ERA today made the ludicrous and provocative offer of halting construction for three days (from May 19) at the boundary of the Boyweg-Almudj Sacred Site Complex to allow a Cultural Heritage Management Plan to be completed. The Commonwealth has previously indicated that such a process will take months to complete.

The Jabiluka project is currently proceeding in the absence of baseline anthropological studies and in breach of contractual and legislative requirements for a Cultural Heritage Management Plan to be completed prior to construction commencing.

Senior Traditional Owner for the Jabiluka land, Yvonne Margarula, said:

“This is the saddest day for us. We are sorry for that country. We are very worried about the consequences for our people. All the Aboriginal people who know that area, not just the Mirrar, want the construction to stop.”

“We have told the Government and the mining company about the sacred sites near the Jabiluka minesite so many times. They have told us they don't believe these areas are sacred sites but they will not stop construction so we can show them these areas properly.”

“They have some of these areas marked on their mining maps but they are going to destroy them anyway. They are killing our culture intentionally. They are killing us. Already we are getting sick from interference with the area.”

The Mirrar have offered to fully co-operate in cultural mapping of the Jabiluka minesite area if ERA postpones construction in the highly sensitive area of the Boyweg-Almudj Sacred Site Complex until a Cultural Heritage Management Plan is completed. This offer has been rejected.

The Commonwealth Government has also been informed of the offer but has decided not to take any action to protect the threatened area.

The deep concerns of the Traditional Owners and Custodians have been conveyed to the World Heritage Committee who is currently considering whether to place Kakadu National Park on the List of World Heritage In Danger. In December 1998 the World Heritage Committee accepted that the Boyweg-Almudj Sacred Site Complex was an integral part of the Kakadu World Heritage Area.

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