

KAKADU IN DANGER! MIRRAR WELCOME UN REPORT

November 25, 1998

The Mirrar people today welcomed the final report of the UNESCO Special Mission to Kakadu, including their central recommendation that mining at Jabiluka not proceed.

At the same time the Mirrar rejected the Federal Government's claim, supported by mining company ERA, that the report was biased and pre-determined.

Executive Officer of the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, Jacqui Katona said today:

"The only substantial documents which the Mission had supplied to them prior to their visit were those provided by the Australian Government. The Australian Government also hosted two of the Mission members in Australia for weeks before the mission officially began. The Australian Government is grasping at straws - if anything the Mission spent a disproportionate amount of time considering the arguments of industry and government, not Traditional Owners and their supporters.

"Minister Hill's assertions that the Mission's report was contradictory because it failed to recommend that the Ranger Uranium Mine be closed down are fallacious and desperate. The fact is that the Mission was specifically briefed to assess future mines - not the existing Ranger project. Nevertheless the Mission were urged by Traditional Owners to consider the tremendous negative impact that Ranger has inflicted on the cultural tradition of Aboriginal people over the last twenty years. The Mission has recognised the cumulative impact of mining in the region, something which the Australian Government seems to have difficulty understanding.

"Minister Hill's claims that Ranger has been operating for 18 years without impact on Kakadu are fundamentally racist. The Australian Government has been repeatedly informed by their own experts that mining at Ranger and its associated activities is contributing to the destruction of Aboriginal culture in Kakadu. Minister Hill seems to find it convenient to forget that Aboriginal people live in the Kakadu region and that their living tradition is the foundation for Kakadu's World Heritage status.

"The Minister's claim that the final report does not reflect the views of the entire drafting group is a classic case of spin-doctoring. The only two Mission members who voiced dissent to the final report are the two observers appointed by the Australian Government.

(more on following page)

"The author of the dissenting two-page letter, Professor Jon Altman, had gone out of his way to attack the Mirrar in public for a prior to the Mission visit and was specifically opposed by the Mirrar in correspondence to the Australian Government and the World Heritage Committee. Professor Altman is a non-Aboriginal, pro-mining economist with little understanding of cultural or environmental issues - his views are wholly dictated by the Australian Government."

"Senator Hill's belligerent outburst at the Mission's findings is disappointingly predictable. In the Jabiluka approval process, the Minister rejected the recommendations of his own Department that there:

‘remains potential for significant adverse impacts on World Heritage and National Estate values, especially indigenous values.’

(p.65, Environment Australia, Environmental Assessment Report: The Jabiluka Mill Alternative, July 1998)

It seems clear to us that Minister Hill has a pre-determined view on Jabiluka, not the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. It is time for the Australian Government to admit that it has made a mistake and review its policy on Jabiluka before the effects of international condemnation on all Australians begin to far outweigh any dubious corporate benefit Jabiluka may bring a small group of ERA shareholders," Ms Katona concluded.

For more information contact Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation on (08) 89792200 / (08) 89220024.