

# Jabiluka: Fight for Country

## How the Mirarr stopped a uranium mine on their land



Much of the traditional estate of the Mirarr people lies within the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park in the Top End of the Northern Territory, Australia. Since the Ranger uranium mine was imposed on Mirarr country in 1980, the Mirarr have been fighting to protect their homelands from mining.

Mirarr Senior Traditional Owner Yvonne Margarula leads the fight to protect Mirarr land. In 1995 the Mirarr clan established the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation (GAC) to represent their rights and interests.

Jabiluka, also on Mirarr land, is one of the world's largest known undeveloped uranium deposits. In 2005 the Mirarr succeeded in halting the development of the proposed Jabiluka mine by securing the agreement of the mining company and authorities that no mining can commence without the written consent of the current generation of Mirarr. This agreement was the culmination of an extraordinary decade-long campaign which saw thousands of people across Australia and around the world stand up and support Mirarr in their opposition to uranium mining on their land.

### Mirarr-led fight stopped plans for uranium mining at Jabiluka:

In 1996 Energy Resources of Australia (ERA), a mining company majority owned by Rio Tinto that operates Ranger mine and holds the lease to Jabiluka, tried to push ahead with mining at Jabiluka. Mirarr remained steadfast in their opposition to further mining on their country and through the GAC began working with supporters in the environment, peace, faith, anti-nuclear and other civil society movements. The result was a major domestic and international campaign against the proposed mine at Jabiluka.

The campaign involved inquiries by Australia's parliament, legal challenges to the mine, a national speaking tour of traditional owners, a protest camp hosting 5,000 people over 8 months (527 of whom were arrested in peaceful protests, including Yvonne Margarula), large rallies in all major Australian cities, mobilisation of a national and international support base of tens of thousands of people, a speaking tour in Europe, lobbying to various international bodies including UNESCO (the World Heritage Committee recommended suspension of work at Jabiluka due to threats to Kakadu's world heritage values) and the UNHCHR, the European



Jabiluka blockade 1998



Mounted police break up anti-mine protest outside North Ltd's Melbourne offices March, 1999



Parliament (which passed a resolution against Jabiluka in 1998) and the US Congress (members of which wrote a letter in support of Mirarr to President Clinton) and much more.

Yvonne Margarula and the then Executive Officer of the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, Jacqui Katona, jointly received the Goldman Environmental Prize and the Friends of the Earth International Award in 1999 in recognition of their campaign efforts. These efforts halted the Jabiluka mine. The Mirarr signed an agreement with ERA in 2005 that prevents the mine's development without the consent of the current generation of owners. The Mirarr never accepted the inevitability of mining at Jabiluka, despite constant company, industry and government assurances that the project would go ahead. In their struggle to protect their country and culture they made Jabiluka a millstone for one of the world's largest resource companies and have redefined future resource conflicts in Australia and internationally by elevating the rights of Indigenous people everywhere to determine what happens to their country and their community.

#### **ERA still keen to mine Jabiluka**

Despite the Jabiluka Long Term Care and Maintenance agreement, ERA has recently made public statements expressing a strong desire to mine Jabiluka. At the company's annual meeting in April 2010 ERA chief executive Rob Atkinson told shareholders that ERA would 'love' to mine Jabiluka. It is clear that ERA's current extensive expansion plans at Ranger are primarily a way of buying time in the hope that approval will eventually be given to mine Jabiluka.



*Clockwise: A concert at the Jabiluka blockade camp in 1998*

*First Lady Hillary Clinton congratulates Jacqui Katona and Yvonne Margarula after they won the 1999 Goldman Environmental Prize*

*The Jabiluka mine site today*

**MIRARR OPPOSITION TO THIS PROSPECT IS CLEAR AND CONTINUING**

**Mirarr still say no to mining at Jabiluka – join them.**

*"We will continue to resist more mining on Mirrar country. We have no choice - this is our land and our life, we can never leave, we must protect it." Yvonne Margarula.*

## **You can help**

Support the Mirarr in their fight to stop uranium mining on their land, send a message to Yvonne Margarula via the website of the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation or by contacting the Corporation.



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