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# Environment News & Action

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## Jabiluka - threatening the jewel in Australia's crown

In August 1998 the final environmental approvals for the Jabiluka uranium mine within the Kakadu World Heritage Park were given by the Commonwealth Government. This was despite months of concerted action by outraged individuals and Aboriginal and conservation groups against the mine proposal.

The proponent of the mine is Energy Resources of Australia (ERA), who already operate the Ranger uranium mine. Potential impacts include vegetation disturbance and erosion from road and bridge building; the burial of thousands of tons of radioactive waste on site; effects on water quality; and invasion of a sensitive area by mining activities.

Yet the site is surrounded by Kakadu National Park, a World Heritage area. This means it has attained international recognition for its significance for people all over the world. On a local level, the site is significant to the Mirrar people, who are among those objecting to the mine.

On 4 October 1998, a UNESCO delegation comes to Australia to investigate the threat that the Jabiluka uranium mine poses to the Kakadu.

The decision for the World Heritage Bureau to send the delegation came as a result of unprecedented and widespread international condemnation as ERA pushes ahead with Jabiluka. The delegation is instructed to present a report recommending actions for the protection of Kakadu to the World Heritage Committee in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1998.

If the World Heritage Committee considers that Kakadu is not being managed properly, they have the authority to de-list the area as a World Heritage site. This situation would embarrass Australia internationally. Furthermore, de-listing Kakadu could have a huge impact on the tourist dollars that are generated from Kakadu simply because it is internationally recognised as a spectacular World Heritage area.

**Amalie Tibbits**  
Environment Centre NT

## Mutawintji handed back

An historic event – the return of lands to the traditional Mutawintji owners – took place on site on 5 September. The formal ceremony opened with a welcoming dance, followed by brief speeches from local and Uluru owners, Premier Bob Carr, Col Markham, Pam Allan, Andrew Refshauge and Tim Moore. Title was handed to traditional owner and local Land Council Chair, William Bates, and a lease of the lands as national park was formally granted. The event was recorded by stencilled hands on a stone plaque.

Congratulations on this successful return of traditional lands to their rightful owners, the Mutawintji people, who have in their turn agreed to lease back the area as national park. NPA hopes the arrangement is a resounding success, and continues as a landmark example in seeking reconciliation of rightful Aboriginal involvement in traditional lands which have been formally recognised, through national park status, as of special natural and cultural value.

The lands known as Mootwingee Historic Site, Mootwingee NP and

Coturaundee NR now comprise inalienable Wiimpatja freehold land, held on behalf of the Aboriginal owners by the Mutawintji Aboriginal Land Council. Leased for an initial period of 30 years to the Minister for the Environment under the new Part 4A of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, they remain part of the conservation estate of NSW but will henceforth be under the care, control and management of a Board of Management with a majority being Aboriginal owners.

Day-to-day management will be implemented by the NPWS District in accordance with an approved Plan of Management. Haydn Washington, well-respected environmentalist, has been appointed as a Board Member. Copies of the lease have been provided to NPA and are also available on the web - see [www.austlii.edu.au/mutawintji](http://www.austlii.edu.au/mutawintji)

NPA wishes to work with Aboriginal people in building on mutual interests in the conservation and better management of our heritage. This is reflected in recent policy statements adopted by NPA State Council.

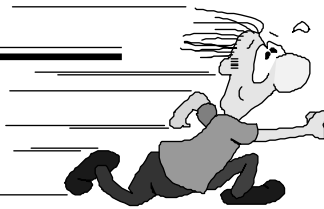
It is clear that the overwhelming link between Aboriginal people and their local lands must be given recognition by positive action, not just words.

**Anne Reeves**  
NPA Vice-President

## Green movements

Two major environment groups have changed premises, taking a number of other groups with them.

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW has moved to Level 5, 362 Kent St, Sydney. With them have gone various project teams, including those working on water reform, forests and native vegetation. Phone numbers are:



NCC: 02 9279 2466  
Forests: 02 9279 2855  
Vegetation: 02 9279 2633  
Water: 02 9279 2522  
Coastal: 02 9279 0955

Total Environment Centre has also changed location to a few floors below NCC. Their new address is Level 2, 362 Kent St, Sydney. The Colong Foundation for Wilderness, Threatened Species Network and the Community Information Project for Sustainable Energy will be working from the new TEC office. The new phone numbers are:

TEC: 02 9299 5599 or 9299 5680  
Colong Foundation: 02 9299 7341  
TSN: 02 9279 1519  
CIPSE: 02 9299 0189

While on the subject of moves, Kim Brebach has left the position of NSW Threatened Species Network Coordinator. The new Coordinator will be Claire Carlton (yes, THAT Claire Carlton). Congratulations to Claire on her new job. □

## Canyon colliery

The Blue Mountains NP was created by an Act of Parliament on 25 September 1959, however an area of some 900 ha was excised by Parliament in 1967 to allow coal mining.

This area is a part of the Grose Wilderness near the source of the Grose River. It is beautiful canyon country and is in very good condition, except for the 50 ha of the actual mine site.

The mine closed in April 1997 as extraction is no longer viable. Earth Sanctuaries Ltd are now planning to set up a tourist venue in the area. This would probably entail fencing their site to exclude feral animals allegedly present, along with introducing native animals that are most likely already there.

Fencing the area and introducing human activities on this scale would disturb the resident animal and bird population. It would restrict their freedom of movement and access to their natural food, water and shelter.

In addition to these problems, some misunderstanding now appears to have arisen regarding the boundaries of the area in question. It seems unclear which sections were originally within the park, which is clouding discussion about future uses.

**Marion Hawley**  
**Blue Mountains Branch**

## Sydney boiling

Sydney residents look set to be boiling their water for a long time to come. The parasites Cryptosporidium and Giardia have surged to the media forefront of late, and become a common topic of conversation by the water cooler in many offices.

An array of reasons have been postulated for the high levels of these parasites being detected. These cover an astonishing range, from dead dogs, to deluge after drought, to new and more accurate testing procedures, to sewage overflows. Sydney Water appears to be confused about the causes, let alone finding a remedy.

The situation puts a whole new slant on "appropriate use" of natural areas. Much of the inner catchment for Warragamba Dam (the main water source for Sydney) is protected bushland – it is in national park or at least under the care of NPWS. When the health of millions of people relies on the provision of clean water, it is essential that this bushland and beyond be managed to exclude unsuitable activity. □

## South Korea halts development

The wetlands of South Korea teem with waterbirds, including a number of migratory birds covered under international agreements. South Korea forms an integral part of the migratory route from the northern hemisphere, which in many cases leads birds to Australia for our summer (see February NPJ).

However, there have been massive land reclamation projects that have extensively removed or damaged critical habitat. South Korea is a mountainous country, which makes wetlands a prime target for development.

Having signed the Ramsar treaty last year, the South Korean Government is now making further progress towards protecting environmental values. The massive Saemankeun reclamation project would have "reclaimed" 40,100 ha of wetland. It has now been halted, as has a development project for the Youngsan-gang River. □

## Paddle the Nepean

The annual Hawkesbury Nepean Canoe Discovery Tour is being held on 18 October. The tour will go from Tench Reserve to Jackson's Lane and will have an environmental focus. It is being organised by the Bents Basin SRA Trust. You can hire a canoe (register by 11 October) or bring your own. Enquiries Maryann or Ken on 02 4774 8662. □

## STOP PRESS

NPWS Western District has advised that the Open Day to be held at the Macquarie Marshes has been deferred to next year due to high water levels. □