

GUNDJEIHMI

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



H. E. Mrs Eleonora Mitrofanova
Chairperson
World Heritage Centre
via email

Friday June 8th 2012

Dear Excellency,

Re: Selous Game Reserve modification of World Heritage Area boundary

I write to you as the Executive Officer of the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation (GAC). GAC is an organisation established, managed and controlled by the Mirarr people to protect and advance their rights and interests.

The traditional estate of the Mirarr people lies within the bounds of the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park and parts of West Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, Australia. Today Mirarr country encompasses the operational Ranger uranium mine Project Area and the site of the second uranium mine proposed for Mirarr country: the Jabiluka Mineral Lease. Uranium mining has been taking place on Mirarr land for three decades. The Mirarr opposed the establishment of Ranger uranium mine and continue to resist all activities that pose a threat to country and culture.

Representatives of GAC attended the 35th session of the World Heritage Committee last year at the request of Mr Jeffrey Lee. Mr Lee is the Senior Traditional owner of the Djok clan and custodian of the Koongarra region, also within the bounds of Kakadu National Park. Due to the presence of uranium Koongarra was initially excluded from both Kakadu National Park and the World Heritage Area. For many years Mr Lee has consistently resisted pressure on him to allow uranium mining on his country. In 2010 he asked the Australian Government to incorporate the area into Kakadu National Park to ensure its permanent protection from mining.

Jeffrey Lee made the same request of the World Heritage Committee when he visited Paris last year and on June 27th, 2011 your Committee declared the Koongarra region part of the Kakadu World Heritage Area. This decision provides important protection for the Koongarra region and here in Australia, progress continues towards the area formally becoming part of Kakadu National Park.

The World Heritage Committee is to be congratulated for its proactive decision to protect the World Heritage Values of Koongarra from uranium mining. Given such a positive stand was taken just one year ago to international acclaim, it is disturbing to learn that the Committee will consider a proposal with the extreme opposite intention at the upcoming session. The objective of the proposed

boundary variation for Selous Game Reserve World Heritage Area in Tanzania has been expressly identified as the facilitation of uranium mining.

As you will be aware, there is strong opposition within Tanzania and beyond to the proposal to mine uranium within the Selous Game Reserve. The Tanzanian NGO Foundation for Environmental Management and Campaign against Poverty (FEMAPO) clearly expressed its position in a submission made to the World Heritage Committee last year:

*"FEMAPO views uranium mining as incompatible with responsible management of resources and an activity that compromises future resources for the next generation and impacts on all of aspects nature conservation, so we firmly stand to resist uranium in Tanzania, particularly the planned mining operations in Selous Reserve."*¹

From our experience we would expect that an excision of a section of the Reserve for uranium mining would undoubtedly impact on the World Heritage Values for which the area was listed. As noted by the IUCN in its evaluation report on this matter last month:

*"...an excision of a 40,000 ha area to create a uranium mine inside the current boundary of a World Heritage property could not be considered to "not affect" Outstanding Universal Value, since there inevitably would be some reduction in the values and the integrity of the property through direct, secondary and cumulative impacts."*²

The Mirarr have lived with the social, environmental and cultural impacts of uranium mining for three decades. Their experience has only served to cement their opposition to mining at Jabiluka and strengthen their commitment to working towards a positive future for the region beyond the life of the Ranger mine. Uranium mining is not an economic solution, as noted by Mirarr Senior Traditional Owner Yvonne Margarula: "The promises never last, but the problems always do".

Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation has in the past looked for and received support from the World Heritage Committee to help protect our cultural and natural estate. We have welcomed and valued this support and we strongly urge you not to approve the boundary variation within the Selous Game Reserve World Heritage Area to facilitate an industry that poses long term challenges.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further information.

Yours sincerely,



Justin O'Brien

Executive Officer

cc. Members of World Heritage Committee

¹ FEMAPO, 2011, *Request for urgent assessment by WHC/ IUCN of threats to the World Heritage values of Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania*. Submission to IUCN and WHC.

² IUCN, 2012, *World Heritage minor boundary modification proposal – IUCN Evaluation, Selous Game Reserve Tanzania – ID No 199*.