



Environment Centre NT



Australian  
Conservation  
Foundation  
INC. ABN 22 007 498 492

**GREENPEACE**



**Friends of  
the Earth**

26 April 2005

His Excellency the French Ambassador to Australia  
Mr Patrick Henault  
French Embassy  
6 Perth Avenue  
Yarralumla ACT 2600  
Canberra

**Re: French government involvement in proposed Koongarra uranium mine, Kakadu National Park, Australia**

Your Excellency

We write as Australian environmental non-government organisations to bring to your attention our grave concern over the proposed development of the Koongarra uranium deposit near the world famous Aboriginal art site and tourist destination, Nourlangie Rock in the World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park.

The French government-owned company AREVA is the proponent of this mine. It has stated that it intends to seek development approval following the expiry on April 26, 2005 of the current development moratorium put in place as a result of the opposition of the area's traditional Aboriginal owners.

The Koongarra deposit is entirely surrounded by Kakadu National Park and any mineral development at this site would:

- severely impact on wetlands of international significance;
- compromise the unique reputation and natural and cultural values of Kakadu;
- impact on one of the most highly visited areas of Kakadu – Nourlangie Rock;
- cause long term disruption to the management of the Park, and;
- create long term problems of containment and rehabilitation of toxic and radioactive materials that will affect the area long after the closure of any mine.

For these reasons we support the view taken by an earlier detailed Commonwealth of Australia assessment into uranium mining in the Kakadu region – the 1977 Ranger Uranium Environment Inquiry – which recommended against the development of the Koongarra project.

In 1998 a special World Heritage Committee Expert Mission recommended that the Koongarra mine site be included into Kakadu NP and that any mining be prevented. This recommendation was '**supported in principle**' by the Australian government in its formal response to the World Heritage report.

UNESCO's Paris based World Heritage Centre has maintained a keen interest in Kakadu uranium mining issues and any attempt to develop Koongarra would be actively contested through this and other domestic and international forums.

We are appealing to the French government to reconsider its involvement in this most controversial project. An attempt by the French government to mine uranium in such a sensitive and internationally renowned natural and cultural heritage location would damage the reputation of France. Such an outcome would be most undesirable, especially at a time when France is seen to be a world leader on matters of global importance.

We request that you relay our concerns to the French government and ask it to reconsider its involvement in this project. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or Embassy officials to more fully brief you on this mine proposal, its adverse impacts and why it should not proceed.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information.

Yours sincerely

Peter Robertson

David Sweeney

Michaela Stubbs

James Courtney

*Alex Marr*

ECNT

ACF

FOE

GREENPEACE

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**All C/-**

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Tuesday 26 April 2005:  
19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Chernobyl nuclear disaster**

# **Message to French government: “Keep out of Kakadu”**

Australia's leading environment organizations have joined forces to send a message to the French government not to allow its nuclear subsidiary Areva to develop a new uranium mine in the heart of World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park. Earlier this year Areva signaled its intention to push for the new uranium mine at Koongarra.

**Mining has been blocked for the past five years due to a legal moratorium on negotiations between the mining company and the area's Traditional Owners which expires on 26 April 2005 (today).**

**This day also happens to be the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl in the Ukraine which has so far killed hundreds of people and displaced thousands. The moratorium has been in place for five years.**

Peter Robertson, Campaign Coordinator for the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory (ECNT) said the proposed Koongarra uranium mine would be close to the internationally famous Aboriginal rock art site and tourism destination, Nourlangie Rock.

“For the French government, which prides itself on its cultural awareness, to push ahead with this mine would be equivalent to an Australian company going to Paris and bulldozing the Louvre for the recovery of picture frames.”

Greenpeace Australia spokesperson James Courtney said that there would be an international outcry if the French government went ahead with the mine.

“After the experience of Muroroa and the Rainbow Warrior the last thing the French government needs is another nuclear-related PR disaster in the southern hemisphere.”

ACF anti-nuclear campaigner Dave Sweeney said two landmark official reports on Kakadu, one by the Commonwealth of Australia (Fox report 1977) and one by the World Heritage Committee (1999) had clearly rejected the Koongarra uranium mine because of its impacts on the natural and cultural heritage of Kakadu.

“In its formal response to the 1999 World Heritage Committee report, the Howard government ‘accepted in principle’ the recommendation that Koongarra be incorporated into Kakadu and mining be precluded. Now is the time to relay that message to the French government.”

TWS Campaign Director Alec Marr said the recent protracted campaign against the proposed Jabiluka mine, which

“Why would we sacrifice such an exceptional environment which is already earning millions through tourism and has the potential to earn more with appropriate tourism development?”

FOE spokesperson Michaela Stubbs said the nuclear industry had shown itself time and again to be incapable of preventing deadly and environmentally damaging accidents, leaks and proliferation.

“Wherever you see the nuclear industry operating you see people and the planet placed at unacceptable risk. From the accident-prone Ranger uranium mine, to Chernobyl, to all the stockpiles of highly radioactive waste piled up around the world without any safe disposal, to the secretive nuclear weapons manufacturing centres across the planet – this is a dirty and dangerous industry that we don’t need and the planet cannot afford.”

Further comment: Peter Robertson, Environment Centre NT, 0409 089 020

## **ACTIONS TODAY – Tues. 26 April**

- **A letter (attached) will be sent today to the French embassy in Canberra.**
- **A gathering will be held outside Parliament House, Darwin, at 1pm.**