



KAKADU "NOT IN DANGER"

Environment Minister Robert Hill's vision of a post-modern nuclear wonderland, with uranium mines and "world heritage values" existing side by side, cleared another hurdle recently as he convinced the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations not to list Kakadu National Park as a World Heritage area "in danger".

On the 13th of July, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee effectively gave the green light to the Jabiluka uranium mine. The committee voted against the representation of the Mirrar People, the traditional owners of the Jabiluka area, that Kakadu should be placed on the World Heritage In Danger list. Is this decision an economic success story, or an environmental catastrophe?

The alliance formed by numerous groups to push for an "In Danger" World Heritage Listing for Kakadu included the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, the Mirrar people (the traditional Aboriginal owners of the Kakadu area), the ALP, Democrats and Greens.

However, they were overpowered by the Federal Government and Energy Resources of Australia as they cajoled the World Heritage Committee to dismiss Kakadu as 'endangered'. The Australian Government spent at least \$1 million on an international "whole of government" lobbying campaign to deal with and convince UNESCO delegates to vote against the initial recommendations of their own team of experts. Australia managed to gain the crucial support of the United States against the "in danger" vote, and eventually only the Cuban delegate voted that another uranium mine would not endanger Kakadu's environmental and cultural World Heritage values.

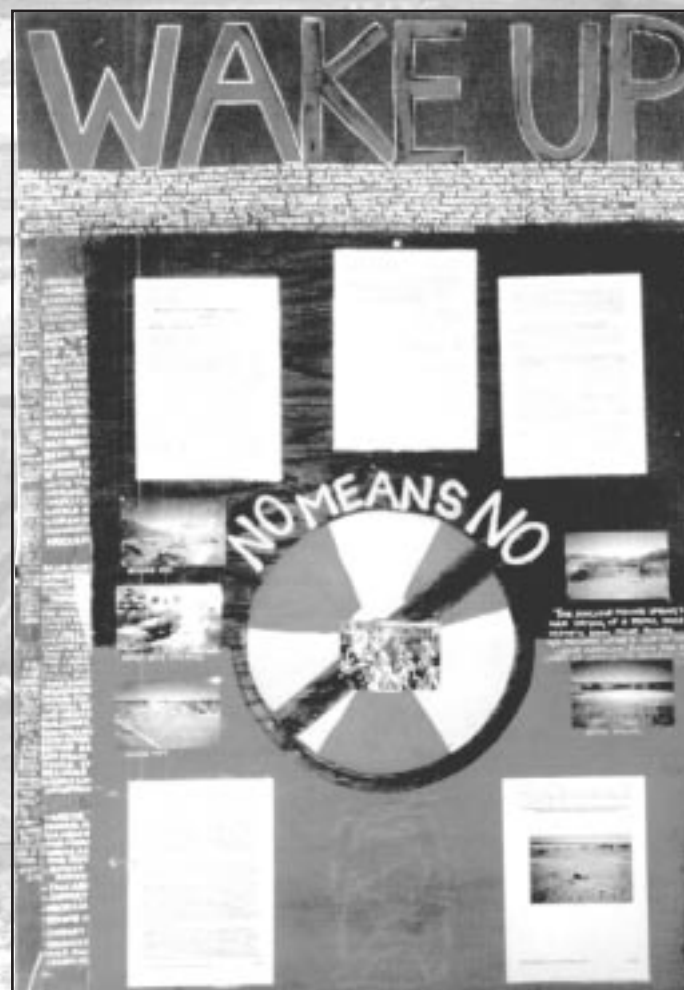
Jabiluka, a uranium mine the size of two football fields situated in the far northern

eastern corner of Kakadu National Park, is now to be mined at the beginning of 2001, however, production will increase as the nearby Ranger mine is phased out. What angered Senator Robert Hill, Liberal Environment Minister and Minister for the mining of Jabiluka, was that Ranger, a huge open-cut mine of 18 years was accepted as not being a threat to the environment. Considering the improvements in technology over the 18 years, and the fact that Jabiluka is actually a mine situated 20 kilometres underground, Senator Hill found it ludicrous that Jabiluka is being attacked when Ranger 'received less opposition.'

In an interview with Philip Shirvington, the head of Energy Resources of Australia (the people who want to mine Jabiluka), the *Tertangala* learnt that the ERA gained the Government's backing by agreeing that Jabiluka will not be fully operational until the Ranger mine had finished in 2006. He also said that environmentalists should appreciate that the mine will bring billions of dollars into Australia. The Mirrar people, however, have refused to accept royalties from the mine.

Whether Jabiluka will be an Australian success story remains to be seen. In the meantime, more protests will definitely be organised against ERA and the Liberal Government.

• *The interview was conducted by Richard Goncalves for Ten News Sydney, whilst he was undertaking work experience with Ten News.*



Picture this. Defence Minister John Moore decides to take decisive action against the global military industrial complex. Armed with a double chamber bong, a peace placard, flowers sticking out of every orifice and his conservative loins humping the air to Jefferson Airplane he decides to stage a sit in protest against the very portfolio that pays him over \$110,000 per year.

Not very likely is it? A hard right government minister doing all he can to bring disrepute to his portfolio and in doing so the international standing of the country that he was elected to help govern. John Moore may be innocent of doing every thing he can to shaft his department and its aims, but it's nice to know that Senator Robert Hill, Environment Minister, is doing exactly this.

From the time Robert Hill was handed the portfolio of the Environment his actions have done more to harm the natural heritage of this country than a whole swag of woodchippers, miners and polluters could ever hope to achieve. Perhaps the best case in point is the recent decision by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) of UNSECO to reject all of its scientific findings and effectively rubber stamp a uranium mine in the jewel of Australia's World Heritage crown, Kakadu National Park.

This is what the Australian Government has done. Robert Hill and officials in Foreign Affairs have spent the last six months travelling to every one of the 21 countries on the WHC - from the United States to Niger - making all sorts of deals which have yet to see the light of day. This intensive lobbying, combined with their 'hoodwinking' strategy where they dumped new information on the committee at the last minute, was too much for UNESCO.

A team of over 20 diplomats was sent to Paris, with airfares and plush hotels all footed by the Australian taxpayer, to stop the Australian conservation movement from gaining yet another solid victory. The Greens in the European parliament also helped lobby ministers across Europe. However, as one of the French Greens was often heard to say 'we have had much recent success, but we are not yet the kings'.

The astonishing fact is that despite this being make or break for the company who runs the mine, Energy Resources of Australia, they decided against sending representation of their own. So confident were they of the government compromising themselves that they did not even bother to send a delegation to Paris to lobby, so the taxpayers were footing the entire lobby bill, with Senator Hill leading the way.

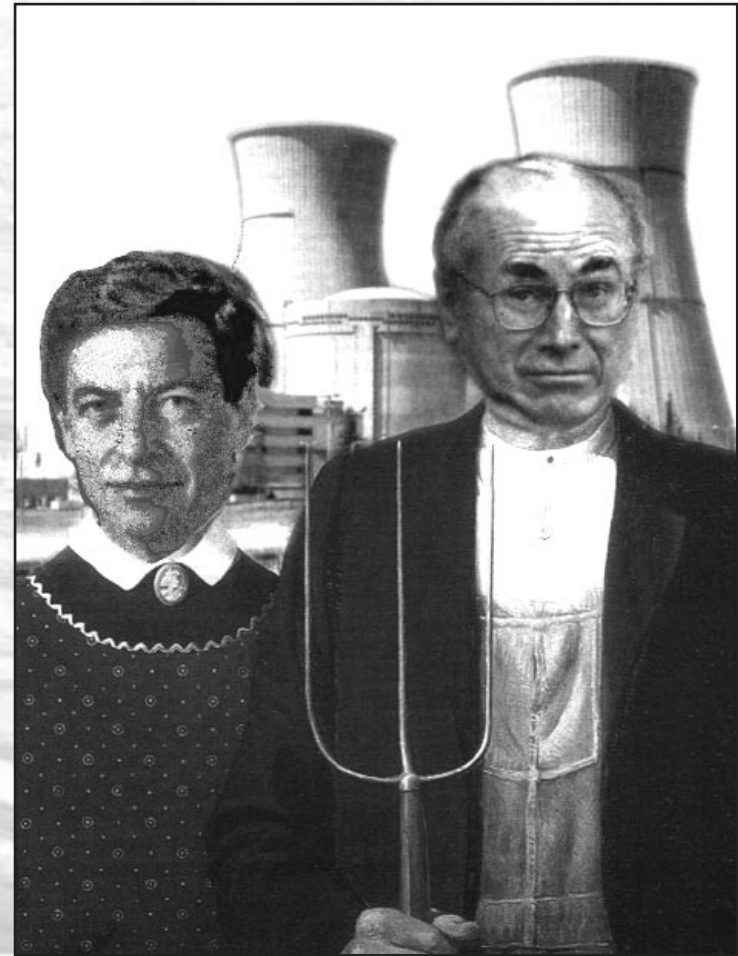
This kind of behaviour by an incumbent Federal Government minister does not exactly point towards a government a government caring as much for people as it does for the giant multi million dollar resource depletion industries. Can you imagine the government spending this much money and effort to lobby *on behalf* of a disadvantaged group in Australia? Perhaps for improvements in the living conditions of Aborigines?

When private companies can rest easy that government will do their immoral dirty work for them, Australia has truly sunk to the bottom of the international political scrap heap.

- Chris Heppel

This article contains excerpts from Christine Milne and Ben Oquist who were in Paris for the Australian Greens.

SENATOR ROBERT HILL, INDUSTRY LOBBYIST [oh, and federal environment minister]



“My government has created hundreds of jobs in the dictionary revision industries” the Prime Minister said yesterday, raising an eyebrow at the extent to which he has been able to pillage the linguistic, along with the natural, environment. He continued: “We are attracting foreign investment in our definition industry; the French want shares in our merged Ministry of Environment and Nuclear Fuels, the Soeharto family want to invest in our definitions of conflict of interest, and we’ve had offers from the Afrikaaner Revival Movement for our definition of Reconciliation.”