

AUSTRALIA

Kakadu National Park

II.1 Introduction

Year of Inscription 1981, 1987, 1992

Organisation Responsible for the Report

- Environment Australia
Kakadu National Park Board of Management
Jabiru, Northern Territory
Australia

II.2 Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria N ii, iii, iv C i, vi

Statement of Significance

- Proposed as follows:
The “geomorphology and ecology of these coastal floodplains have undergone considerable change in a relatively short geological period”, and are a useful record of sea-level change and the successional response of mangroves in Northern Australia.
The scale and integrity of the landscape, little affected by European settlement, contains a variety of habitats including woodlands, monsoon rainforests, wetlands, floodplains, shrubland, heath, and a “largely intact faunal composition.”
“Kakadu is a landscape of cultural, religious & social significance to local Aboriginal people. Special places in the landscape include ceremonial places, sites of religious significance, archaeological and rock art sites.”
“The rock art of Kakadu continues to be an important storehouse and reference of traditions and knowledge for contemporary generations of Aboriginal traditional owners.” An estimated 15,000 such ‘living sites’ exist across the escarpment & plateau country.
- An indicative table of WH attributes was attached.

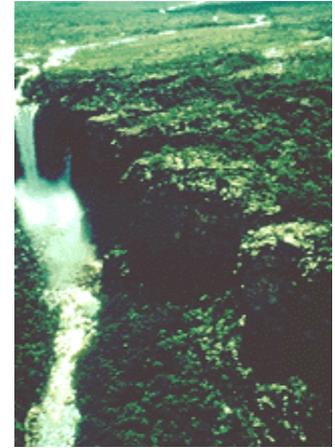
Status of Site Boundaries

- “The northern boundary is coastline; the eastern boundary is Arnhem Land, which is Aboriginal land. To the south, the Mary River forms a readily identifiable natural boundary, and Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) NP is nearby.”
- Three mining leases “pre-exist the establishment of the Park” outside the park boundaries. “These are Ranger, Jabiluka & Koongarra mineral leases, with the Ranger uranium mine being the only operational mine in the region.”

II.3 Statement of Authenticity/Integrity

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- Kakadu NP was nominated in 3 successive stages. The Stage III ‘consolidated nomination’ in 1992 reported that, “few species have been lost from the area since the arrival of non-Aboriginal people”; that the Park is “ecologically intact, with surrounding areas providing a very good buffer against external, potentially adverse, influences”; and that rock paintings are in a good state of conservation.
- Illegal collection of stone artefacts has been reported at some of the more accessible cultural sites.
- Key ecological integrity issues were examined by an IUCN technical evaluation in March 1992 including the: (i) cessation of small-scale mining & overstocking; (ii) appropriate tourism measures; (iii) environmental impacts of the Mount Bunday military training area; and (iv) “future potential effects of uranium mining outside the Park.”



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II.4 Management

Administrative and Management Arrangements

- The “legislative foundation” for the joint management of the Park by the ‘Kakadu Board of Management’ (composed of a 10/14 Aboriginal majority) is found in the EPBC Act (1999) & ‘NT Aboriginal Land Rights Act’ (1976).
- Other state-level statutes include the: ‘NT Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act’ (1989); ‘Heritage Conservation Act’ (1991); ‘Territory & Wildlife Conservation Act’ (1995); and ‘Planning Act’ (1999).
- A local ‘Environment Protection (Alligator Rivers Region) Act’ (1978) provides specific protection to a catchment area vulnerable to the effects of mining.
- “Approximately 50% of the land in the Park is Aboriginal land, with title being held by Aboriginal land trusts”. A lease to the Director of National Parks was executed in 1978, and revised in 1991.
- The first KNP Plan of Management was produced in 1981. Review is currently underway for a 5th plan to come into effect in 2004.
- “Although not inscribed on the WH List as a cultural landscape, the current Plan of Management identifies Kakadu National Park as a cultural landscape, shaped by many generations of Traditional Owners.”

Present State of Conservation

- “Australia has provided numerous reports to the WH Committee... including responding to calls for the Park to be included on the WH in Danger List.”
- In April 1999, the Australian Government presented a detailed report ‘Australia’s Kakadu: Protecting World Heritage’ which addressed point-by-point the threats & recommendations identified by the Chairperson of the WH Committee during a mission in June 1998.
- In April 2000, Australia provided an updated progress report on meeting commitments made in ‘Australia’s Kakadu’. In July 2000, IUCN & an ‘Independent Science Panel’ (ISP) visited Kakadu, and submitted a report to the WH Committee in Cairns, 2000.
- The 2000 WH Committee considered that the Jabiluka Mine proposal did not threaten the “biological and ecological systems” of Kakadu. However, “dialogue between the State Party and the Traditional Owners of the mine area continues”. The Australian government is committed to inform WHC “openly and transparently” of progress.
- A set of internet links to all the relevant reports from the State Party between 1998-2000 were provided.

“Although not inscribed on the WH List as a cultural landscape, the current Plan of Management identifies Kakadu National Park as a cultural landscape, shaped by many generations of Traditional Owners.”

Staffing and Training Needs

- In June 2002, 70 people were employed by “Parks Australia North for Kakadu”, 41% of which comprised of Aboriginal staff members.
- Parks Australia is committed to an ‘Indigenous Career Development & Recruitment Strategy’ designed to “enable promotion” of Traditional Owners to higher management positions by continuous training.

Financial Situation

- In 2001-2002, the Commonwealth Government allocated approx. AUS\$ 9.6 million (US\$ 5.8 million) for operations & capital works in Kakadu NP.
- “Lease payments – including rental and a share of revenue generated from Park use fees and charges – are made to the Northern Land Council on behalf of the Land Trusts.” No figures supplied.
- * International Assistance from WHF: none.

Access to IT

- No information supplied.

Visitor Management

- Based on official ticket sales between 1992 and 2001, visitors increased from 128,355 to 169,517 per year.
- Approx 51% of visitors are from overseas, & 50% are on organised tours for an average stay of 2.6 days.
- Visitor facilities include: (i) the Bowali Visitor Centre & Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre; (ii) lookout platforms; (iii) interpretive displays; (iv) publications & videos; and (v) daily art site talks by rangers.
- Accommodation inside the park covers 25 designated camping sites, bush-style camping, a youth hostel & motel-style facilities.

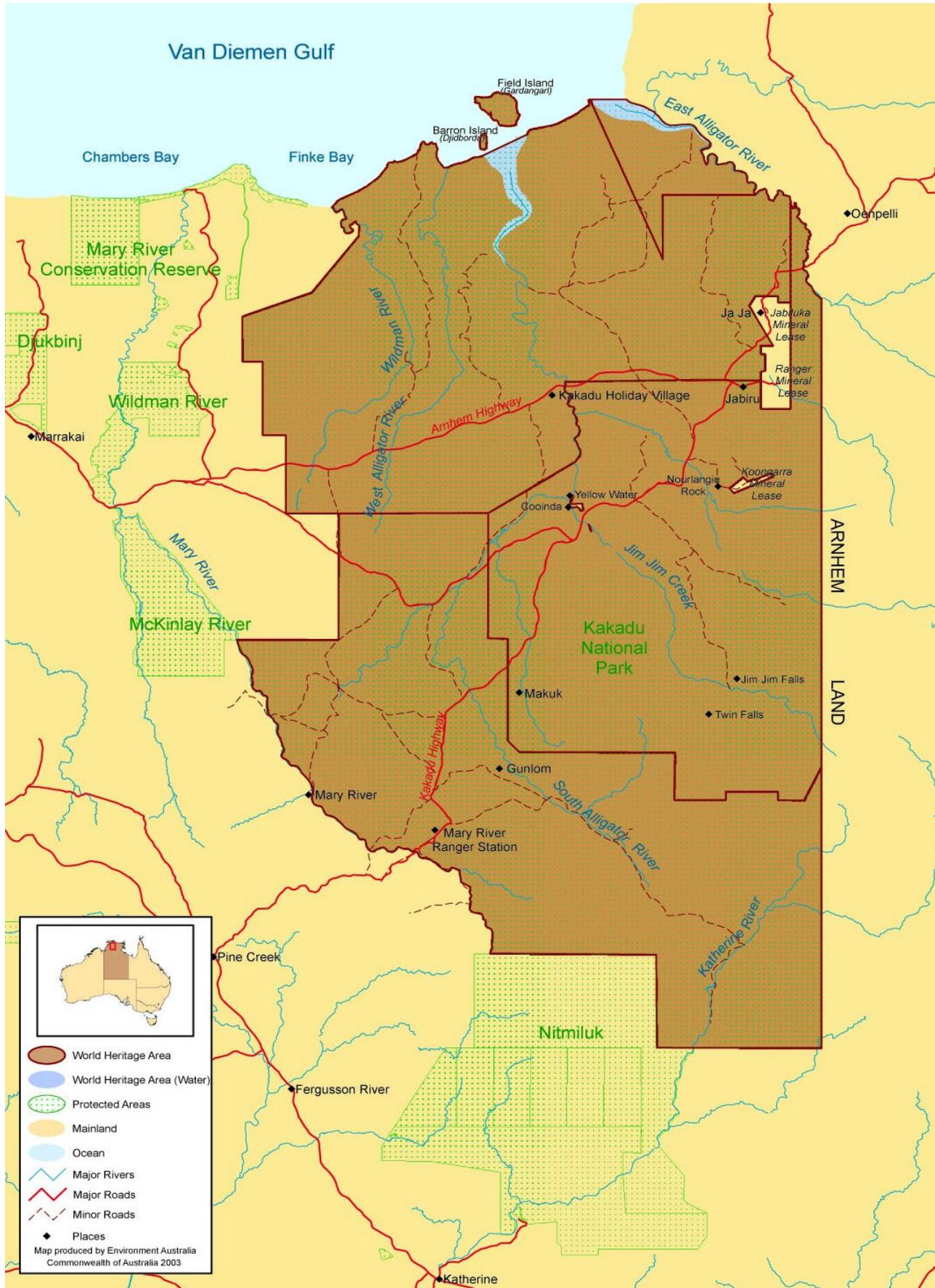
II.5 Factors Affecting the Property

Threats and Risks

- Introduced & feral animals, weeds (i.e. cane toad, Asian water buffalo, *Salvinia*, *Mimosa*),
 - Saltwater intrusion (swamp to mangrove conversion),
 - Uranium mill residue dumps,
 - Disruption of Aboriginal fire-burning “mosaic”,
 - Excessive staff time dedicated to tourism,
 - Damage to rock art & archaeological sites,
 - Loss of oral cultural heritage.

Counteractive Plans

- A ‘Feral Animals Strategy’ includes a range of habitats & their sensitivities to disturbance.
- Weed infestations are treated “within a regional context” to avoid new sources of infestations.
- “Traditional owners are taking charge of and conducting traditional burning”, making a “positive contribution” to fire & biodiversity management.
- In November 2000, “interim remediation” was carried out near Gunlom where Uranium mill residues were dumped during the 1950s & 1960s. This involved the “placement of armour rock”, and the storage of radioactive material “in drums, within shipping containers and in a locked compound”.
- In 1996, ‘Environment Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist’ (ERISS) published a vulnerability assessment of predicted climate change & sea-level rise in the Alligator Rivers Region.
- A zoning scheme with ‘area plans’ and restrictions on boating, biking, horse riding & rock climbing has been designed to control tourism.



Map of Kakadu National Park showing WH Area (in brown)

II.6 Monitoring

Monitoring Arrangements

- The 'Kakadu Region Social Impact Study' (KRSIS) addressed community development issues in 1997.
- Along with the mining company, "the ERISS carries out research & monitoring of uranium mining activities", with a focus on "off-site aquatic impacts" on Kakadu's streams & waterfalls.
- Site-level monitoring of water catchments has been "instigated on the recommendations of the ISP."
- Permanent *in situ* monitoring sites were established in 1996 to detect sea-level change with remote sensing techniques.

Monitoring Indicators

- A 3-page 'Monitoring Matrix' was presented.
- Salient indicators include: (i) cane toad & 11 other fauna surveys; (ii) long-term landscape change using aerial photography; (iii) art site & oral history records; (iv) an 'environmental radioactivity programme' for Aboriginal bush foods; (v) baseline data on aquatic systems "potentially at risk from mining operations".

II.7 Conclusions and Recommended Actions

Conclusions and Proposed Actions

- "The Gunlom Aboriginal Land Trust lease in the south of Kakadu requires completion of a 'plan of environmental rehabilitation' for Guratba (Coronation Hill) and other old uranium mine sites".
- Parks Australia endeavours to fully implement "the achievement of this legal commitment" for the agreed rehabilitation of the Ranger Mine area by 31 December 2015.
- In late 2001, the Northern Land Council, traditional Aboriginal owners & Parks Australia "agreed to divide the rehabilitation project into Part A (sites with no or only minor radiological contamination) & Part B (those that have significant/complex radiological contamination)."
- In consultation with the Traditional Owners, the Kakadu Board of Management has discussed the possibility of Kakadu NP, the greater Kakadu Region, or the East Alligator River, being re-nominated as a WH Cultural Landscape.

*State of Conservation Reports

1986 CC-CONF.003/INF.4 IUCN was informed by the Australian authorities that the boundaries of the site had been considerably enlarged to include an important wetland area.

1991 SC-CONF.002/4 The Committee was pleased to be informed of the proposed Stage III extension of the WH Site. As the proposed additional area was higher than 10% of the original extent of the property, the Committee recommended that the extension be considered as a new nomination.

1994 WHC-CONF.001/3b An ICOMOS mission which visited Kakadu in April 1994, had discussions with Traditional Owner representatives on the managing council & visited a number of the rock-art sites. It observed the mosaic burning land-management practices employed by the park management and in use by Aboriginal groups for at least 25,000 years. The mission felt that the area represented an important cultural landscape.

1997 WHC-CONF.208/8BRev IUCN reported on a proposal to mine on a mining lease enclave outside the WH area. IUCN reported that 77 concerns had been identified over the proposal and the Senior Supervisory Scientist had suggested that a new EIA would be needed. ICOMOS considered that care

needed to be taken to protect important sacred sites. It also expressed concern that the traditional owners had not participated in the environmental impact statement. The Australian Government advised that the '77 concerns' were in fact mandatory conditions set by the Government on the mining company, and that it had commissioned an independent social impact study. Australia added that there had been uranium mining in the area outside the WH site for 20 years with no significant environmental effects.

1998 WHC-CONF.202/4 IUCN informed the Ext. Bureau that its advice on the matter of the Jabluka mine was guided by the use of the precautionary principle. After hearing the views of Bureau members, the Chairperson summarised the debate as a consensus on the need to proceed according to the precautionary principle, even in the absence of complete data. The Chair emphasised that the multi-faceted environmental, cultural & legal issues relating to the conservation of the site highlighted the need for a fact-finding mission.

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Waterbirds at Kakadu National Park

1998 WHC-CONF.203/8Rev & 203/INF.18 Following a joint IUCN & ICOMOS mission in November 1998, Professor Francioni presented 16 recommendations to the WH Committee concerning ascertained and potential dangers to Kakadu National Park posed by the Jabiluka mining proposal. He referred to the visual impacts and dangers to the living cultural heritage of Kakadu; the lack of recognition of the Kakadu cultural landscape; the need to reassess & expand the boundaries of the park; and referred to an overall breakdown in the trust and communication of the “joint management” regime.

The Chairperson noted that Australia had provided WHC with detailed reports on the assessment & approvals process of the Jabiluka mine site, and that WHC had also received many protest letters. The Chairperson further expressed the high-level mission’s gratitude to the Australian authorities for their considerable assistance. IUCN presented a position statement approved by the Director-General of IUCN (referring to a resolution adopted by the World Conservation Congress in 1996) stating that the conditions existed for inscribing Kakadu on the List of WH in Danger. The statement also cautioned that a failure to recognise the dangers to the property would diminish the standards of, and risk prejudicing the prestige of the Convention. ICOMOS gave general support to the mission report.

The Observer of Australia responded that the recommendations were flawed and unacceptable to the Australian Government. The formulation of recommendations were then discussed in several closed sessions with Bureau members. The Committee later urged the Australian Government & Energy Resources Australia Inc. to undertake the voluntary suspension of construction of the mine, and recommended that the authorities provide a detailed report on: (a) the threats posed by the mine; (b) alternatives for milling ore at Jabiluka & Ranger; and (c) a detailed update on the implementation of a cultural heritage management plan.

1999 WHC-CONF.209/14 The 3rd extraordinary session of the Committee considered that it was the clear responsibility of the Australian Government to regulate the activities of a private company such as Energy Resources of Australia (ERA), and requested ICSU to continue the work of the Independent Scientific Panel in co-operation with the Supervising Scientist & IUCN. ERA informed the Committee that it was committed to a “transition from Ranger to Jabiluka such that two mines will not be in full production simultaneously.” It was noted that the 4th World Archaeological Congress adopted a resolution in January 1999 calling for the inclusion of Kakadu on the List of WH in Danger. The Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation requested that ICOMOS & ICCROM representatives visit Kakadu to assist in the development

of a “World’s Best Practice” sacred site assessment process.

1999 WHC-CONF.204/5 The Bureau noted that WHC received a letter in October 1999 from Australia providing a report on progress made since July 1999. The report from the State Party indicated that drilling at Jabiluka had ceased, and that Energy Resources of Australia Ltd had resolved to work in consultation with Traditional Owners & ICOMOS in developing a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP).

2000 WHC-CONF.202/5 The Bureau was informed that WHC had received a report on Australia’s progress in implementing commitments made to the Committee in 1999. In addition, WHC received correspondence concerning the water management system at Jabiluka, and a leak of tailings water contaminated with manganese at the Ranger uranium mine. In May 2000, WHC received a letter from the WH Branch of Environment Australia reporting that the pipe, from which the leak of tailings water, which took place between December 1999-April 2000, had been repaired, and water quality standards had not been exceeded.

2000 WHC-CONF.204/10 In co-operation with the Australian Supervising Scientist, the Independent Scientific Panel (ISP) of the International Council for Science (ICSU) and a representative of IUCN made a site visit in July 2000 to the Jabiluka & Ranger Mineral Leases. In September 2000, IUCN informed WHC that it considered that the tailings pipe leak to have had minor ecological impact, but noted the delays in reporting the leakage and the inconsistency in responses between the Northern Territory Authority and the more detailed response of the Australian Government & ERA. IUCN believed this vindicated the need for the Federal Government of Australia to resume direct control for the operations on a mine lease within the WH Area.

2000 WHC-CONF.204/21 The ISP concluded that the risks to the natural value of the Kakadu WH Site were small, but noted that the development of the Jabiluka Mill Alternative should not be allowed to threaten the natural WH value of Kakadu National Park.

2001 WHC-CONF. 205/5 In letters dated March-April 2001, the State Party confirmed that the Jabiluka mine site remains on a stand-by & environmental management phase with stakeholder discussions. IUCN noted that: (a) no mining was taking place at Jabiluka; (b) current activity was focused on responding to the concerns of Aboriginal people; (c) features common to both the Ranger Mill Alternative (RMA) & the Jabiluka Mill Alternative (JMA) had been constructed in line with the environmental impact assessment process; and (d) in its agreement with the 2001 WH Committee, the Australian Government undertook to establish an Independent Science Advisory

*“In 2001, the World Heritage Committee was informed of the first sighting of cane toads (*Bufo marinus*) in Kakadu.”*

Committee (ISAC) “to report openly, independently and without restriction”. The State Party also reported the first sighting of cane toads (*Bufo marinus*) in Kakadu.

2001 WHC-CONF.208/10 The State Party provided new information on progress with the (i) cultural landscape & ecosystem analysis; (ii) recruitment of a water resource specialist; and (iii) details of the newly established ISAC. IUCN noted that the proposed ISAC included no NGO representation. A recent report from 3 Australian NGOs warned that no current mine plan is publicly available, and that the ‘interim water management pond’ at Jabiluka almost overflowed in mid-February 2001 forcing the company to resort to pumping water contaminated with uranium & other minerals into underground shafts. IUCN noted that the report raised concerns over the storage of an estimated 20,000 tonne stockpile of mineralised ore unearthed during the construction of Jabiluka. IUCN recommended that the above matters be referred to the first meeting of the ISAC.

2001 WHC-CONF.208/24 The State Party provided responses to the matters raised in 2001 WHC-CONF.208/10 and also noted that the ‘Alligator Rivers Region Technical Committee’ (ARRTC) will have the role of the Independent Scientific Advisory Committee for the Kakadu region.