



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

McArthur River Mines may be guilty of an offence by denying access to sacred sites

18 June 2008

Northern Land Council (NLC) Chief Executive, Mr Kim Hill today said that McArthur River Mines, and its owner Xstrata may be guilty of an offence under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* for refusing traditional owners access to the Stinking Turtle sacred site and other sites.

Mr Hill also calls on MRM and Xstrata to allow the Gurdanji, Mara, Garawa and Yanyuwa traditional owners access to their sacred sites in accordance with Aboriginal tradition under the *Sacred Sites Act*.

“There is a disturbing pattern whereby traditional owners are regularly denied their rights to visit their sacred sites on the McArthur River mining lease, and on the surrounding country – and this is a breach of the *Sacred Sites Act*,” he said.

“This is the third time that Xstrata has stopped or tried to stop traditional owners legally entering the mine site to visit their sacred sites.

“The first time was in July last year when senior custodian, Harry Lansen and others were dramatically stopped from entering the McArthur River pastoral lease by the mine’s Manager, Brian Hearne who landed a helicopter in front of their vehicle.

“Then, just a few weeks ago, Xstrata issued trespass notices to a number of traditional owners who had legally visited the mine site on 21 May when they tried to access a sacred site in the area.

“And today Xstrata has stopped the traditional owners again when all they want is to hold a ceremony at their sacred sites because those sites may not be there for much longer now that the mine is expanding and the McArthur River has been diverted,” said Mr Hill.

“The NLC will be looking into this, and recommending any legal recourse to the traditional owners, as we are required to do under the *Land Rights Act*.”

Mr Hill also said that the NLC’s Full Council endorses and supports the lawful actions taken today by the traditional owners to enter the mine site for ceremonial purposes at the Stinking Turtle sacred site.

Aboriginal people have a statutory right of access to sacred sites in accordance with Aboriginal tradition under s46 and s47 of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*.

Persons obstructing the rights of Aboriginal people to access sacred sites in accordance with the *Sacred Sites Act* may be guilty of an offence.

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