

1 Scope and conduct of the study

The KRSIS and the EIS

1.1 In mid 1996, in response to a request from traditional owners in the Kakadu Region, the Federal Government through Environment Minister Robert Hill, the Northern Territory Government through Mines and Energy Minister Daryl Manzie, the Northern Land Council (NLC) and Energy Resources of Australia Ltd (ERA), the operating company at the Ranger uranium mine, agreed to sponsor the Kakadu Region Social Impact Study (KRSIS). The KRSIS is in the shadow of, but not part of, the concurrent environmental assessments which precede decision-making on the proposal to mine uranium-bearing ore at Jabiluka, near Ranger.

1.2 The KRSIS is looking at the Kakadu Region (Stages 1 and 2 of Kakadu National Park, henceforth 'the Region') from two perspectives: the situation today and the changing situation over time. By and large, the former perspective that looks at the situation today has been given far more attention and credence during the KRSIS than the latter. This is primarily because the study has been undertaken in parallel with the environmental assessment of ERA's draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released for public review in October 1996 (ERA 1996). ERA lodged its final EIS in June 1997 (ERA 1997) and decisions by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments are expected in August 1997.

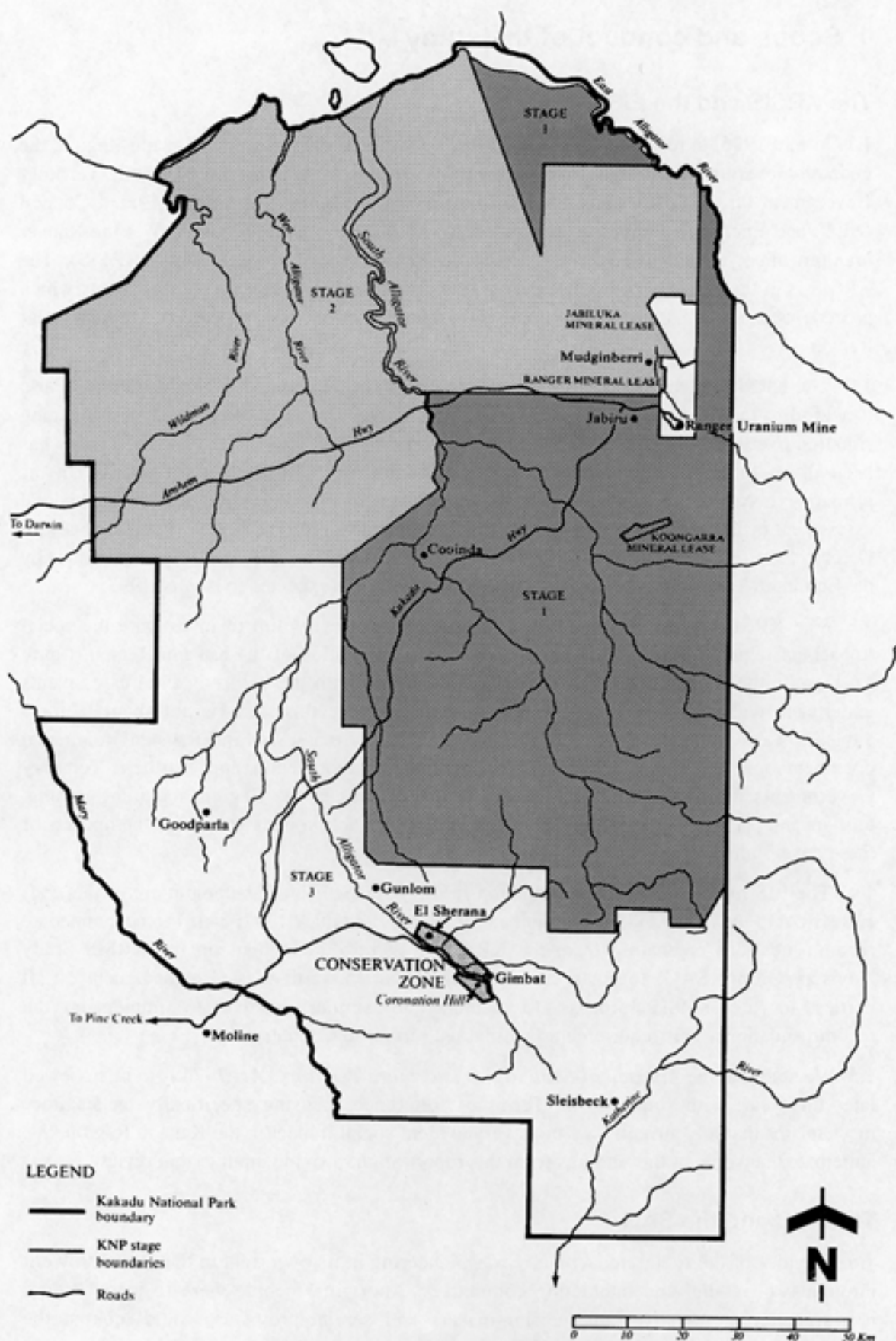
1.3 The KRSIS Terms of Reference (Appendix 1) primarily aim to investigate the social impacts of regional development on the Aboriginal population of the Kakadu Region (figure 1). Despite the rough correlation of the KRSIS timing with the environmental assessments undertaken with respect to the Jabiluka uranium prospect, this study is not about Jabiluka alone. It is also not about environmental impacts which are assessed in ERA's environmental documentation and in evaluation of this by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments. Rather the study is about all development in the Region, including mining, tourism and park management, and about developing an action plan to manage the impacts of these developments on Aboriginal people.

1.4 The EIS refers to ERA's participation in the KRSIS. ERA has committed, in the draft EIS (ERA 1996: 7-11) and the supplement of June 1997 (ERA 1997: 8-16) to accommodate recommendations emanating from the KRSIS. It is now incumbent on the KRSIS Study Advisory Group (SAG) to put a credible action plan forward; it is also incumbent on all parties to the KRSIS process to demonstrate similar resolve to implement the recommendations. This requirement is discussed further in Chapter 5.

1.5 We note that the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* is to be reviewed later this year, with some of the Terms of Reference focusing specifically on statutory mechanisms that are currently having a very evident social impact in the Kakadu Region. We anticipate that some of the findings from this report might provide input to that review.

The APC and the SAG

1.6 The idea of the social impact study was pioneering in its own right in that it was to work through two parallel and interacting committees. Aboriginal people were to identify their issues; and representatives of decision-makers and service-providers would look at the corresponding decisions and services.



1.7 The Aboriginal Project Committee (APC), comprising of senior representatives of the various Aboriginal communities of Kakadu, were to determine the issues, the aspirations, the ideas and the expectations of Aboriginal people. The SAG, comprising of senior representatives of the institutions and agencies influential in decision-making for and about Kakadu were to bring forward their knowledge and their plans. They were then to interact with the APC to transform the issues, aspirations, ideas and expectations into actions which will make a difference; actions which will assist the move towards harmony for the parties. The members of the APC and the SAG are listed in Appendices 2 and 3.

1.8 A key issue is that the APC has undertaken the research, with input and direction from the SAG, to articulate 'a clear statement of Aboriginal experiences, values and aspirations regarding the development of the Region'. The APC Report is being released simultaneously with this report: the research of the APC was an attempt to ensure views were not imposed from non-Aboriginal groups; some of the research involved direct consultation with people living in Jabiru town and at outstations in the National Park (figure 2); and some of the research has resulted in various different viewpoints. The SAG has attempted, in good faith, to respond directly to the APC Report.

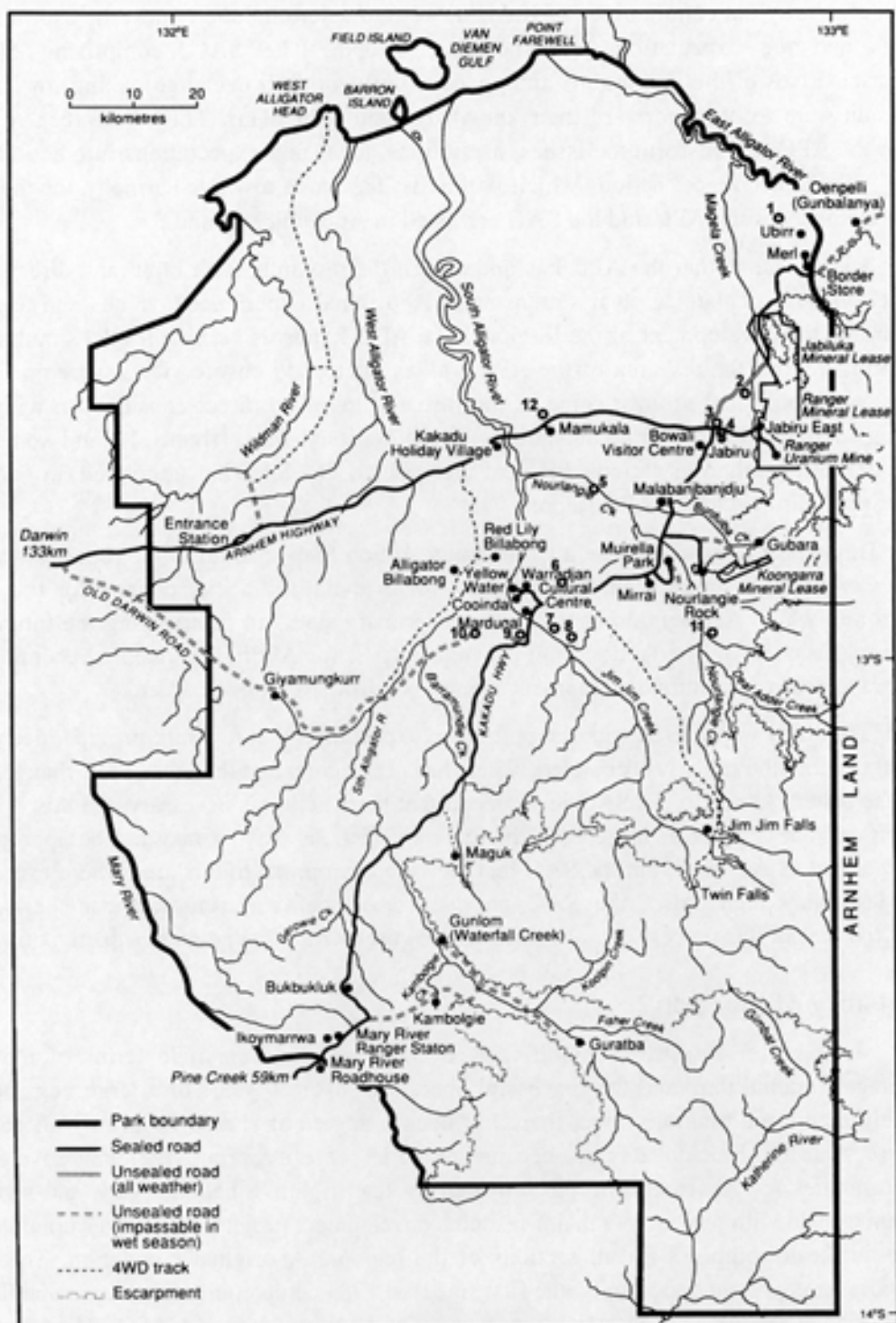
1.9 This report aims to provide a Community Action Plan to address the report of the APC. The Community Action Plan is a blueprint for a revitalised social contact for the Kakadu Region in which Aboriginal people are given primary status in determining the future of the Region (Chapter 3). The Action Plan provides a basis for Aboriginal people becoming better placed to deal with future development scenarios for the Region (Chapter 4).

1.10 The study was started with the optimistic expectation that it would provide incentive for change before the study was complete. There has been action and there has been change, mostly for the better (Appendix 5). SAG recommend that more action is necessary and this is detailed specifically in Chapter 3. In general, the recommendations may or may not be appropriate in another part of Australia, but the SAG feel they are appropriate to this area where expectations are justifiably high. Also, the SAG provide some brief comments on our views of the effectiveness of this process overall which may be useful for other studies (Appendix 6).

A history of inaction?

1.11 In a sense, despite the significant successes of the Region in terms of the World Heritage National Park and the successful operations over 16 years of a large, regulated and closely monitored uranium mine, there has been a degree of shared failure by all parties to ensure that the Kakadu Region became a model of appropriate regional development. Opportunities for Aboriginal people provided by land rights, a national park and significant resources paid with respect to a major resource development project, the Ranger uranium mine, have not been optimised for all sections of the regional Aboriginal population. The KRSIS provides an important opportunity, the first since the 1984 completion of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) social impact study of uranium mining (AIAS 1984), to reflect on lessons that might be learnt from the past so that there will be appropriate benefit both for the current generation and future generations of Aboriginal people in the Region.

1.12 There is a regional perception that the outcomes of previous social impact monitoring, especially the AIAS project (AIAS 1984), have not been effectively implemented. There is also a view that the environmental monitoring undertaken since 1979 by the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist (ERISS) should have extended beyond the physical environment to the social environment (Howitt 1996). There is an alternate view that



o Outstations

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|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Cannon Hill | 5 Nourlangie | 9 Paradise Farm |
| 2 Madjinbardi | 6 Red Lily | 10 Spring Peak |
| 3 Kurrabung Flat | 7 Patonga Airstrip | 11 Goolongorr |
| 4 Manaburduma | 8 Patonga Homestead | 12 Mamukala |

Figure 2 Outstations in the Kakadu Region

Source: Australian Nature Conservation Agency and North Australia Research Unit ANU

this environmental monitoring should only focus on the biophysical environment (see views of Fry reported in Kesteven 1997: 4, 10, and Kesteven & Lea 1997: 5).

1.13 Aboriginal views on other organisations in the Region, and in particular the distribution of authority and responsibility, are also discussed in the APC Report (1997: 48-59) and in more detail in one of the consultancy reports commissioned by the APC (Crough & Cronin 1997). The SAG does not see any value being added by criticising further the historic performance of any particular institution or organisation or individual. Rather it is important to objectively analyse why there have been important regional failures, especially in meeting the basic housing, educational, health and economic needs of some sections of the regional Aboriginal population, and this discussion is presented in Chapter 2. Even more fundamental is the need to ensure future accountability by all organisations for their performance and ongoing monitoring, through implementation of this reports Community Action Plan detailed in Chapter 3. A summary of how individual organisations have already responded to some of the comments and criticisms is provided in Appendix 5.

1.14 It is important to acknowledge that regionally-sponsored research (d'Abbs & Jones 1996) and regionally-coordinated action preceded this study: for example, formation of the Gunbang Action Group, the Kakadu/West Arnhem Employment, Education and Training Group, and the Kakadu Accommodation and Infrastructure Group. These initiatives indicate that regional institutional interests already recognised that there were Aboriginal people who were falling outside the citizenship safety net that should be provided by governments and a range of programs that should be accessible on the basis of need. In some ways, the peculiarities of the Kakadu situation has meant that while some very positive opportunities have been available and taken up by some, others have missed out. It is also important to acknowledge that a very public dispute over the payment of mining moneys between key regional political factions which began in 1994, and is still not fully resolved, is having deleterious regional impacts (Altman 1997).

1.15 There is a history of inaction in the Region despite the fact that many of the social issues and problems revealed during the course of the KRSIS, be they statutory shortcomings in the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, structural and institutional anachronisms, like the continuing reference to Jabiru as a mining, rather than 'open' town, or the destructive impacts of excessive alcohol consumption have been identified many years earlier (Altman 1983; AIAS 1984; Lea & Zehner 1987); the fact that many of these issues have never been adequately addressed cannot be dwelt on here. However, such past inaction now places an additional onus on all who participated in this study to ensure that the Community Action Plan devised here is operationalised, monitored and made to work (Chapter 5). A revitalised and effective social contract for this Region is essential.