

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Arkaroola Seeks Total Mining Ban in Wilderness Sanctuary

The owners of Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary have written to South Australian Premier Mike Rann seeking a total ban on mining activity on the property.

The SA government has ordered that Marathon's uranium exploration activities at Mt Gee, deep in Arkaroola's heartland, be "suspended indefinitely".

This followed an investigation sought by the Rann Government that concluded that the company had wrongly disposed of 22,800 bags of drilling and other waste at the environmentally sensitive site. Some of these bags were found to contain low-level radioactive material.

The Premier described the incident as a "serious breach" of Marathon's exploration licence and used the words 'cowboys' in his criticism of the company's practices.

The Minister for Mineral Resources, Mr Paul Holloway, instructed Marathon not to drill any new holes at Mt Gee. He also ordered the company to clean up the site and satisfy other conditions before a resumption of work would be allowed.

Marg Sprigg, who with her brother Doug manages the award-winning sanctuary founded by their parents 40 years ago, said: "Marathon continues to drill existing holes despite the suspension order, apparently with the SA Government's approval."

We are extremely disappointed that the drilling activity wasn't immediately suspended until after the investigation was completed', Marg Sprigg said. "This is simply a slap on the wrist for Marathon – nothing more to them than a nuisance factor."

In a radio interview on 13 February, Marathon chairman Mr Peter Williams described the contamination breach as 'an error of judgement which shouldn't have happened' and added that Mt Gee was a 'world-class' project in which he had every confidence.

Mr Williams gave the strongest impression that the contamination clean-up was a mere formality and that his company's development program at Mt Gee would proceed once Marathon had satisfied the Government's demands," Marg Sprigg said.

“We genuinely believe that the whole future of Arkaroola as a carefully-managed, world-acclaimed wilderness sanctuary is seriously compromised by Marathon’s clumsy practices.”

Quite apart from the most recent incident, we’ve had to contend with a succession of inappropriate activity, including hydrocarbon spills, waste dispersal, safety issues, damage to our roads and unauthorised use of our scarce water supplies.”

“In summary, Marathon has a poor track record with us to date and we do not have any confidence that they will change their practices.”

Marg Sprigg added: “We fully appreciate that Arkaroola was subject to mining activity many decades ago and that this opened up access to the location and defined water sources. But our parents, SA geologist the late Reg Sprigg and his wife Griselda, looked beyond the mining era and with great vision saw Arkaroola’s potential as a lasting, largely unspoilt and magnificent environmental reserve for the benefit of all. We have devoted our working lives to achieve that end.”

We ask the Premier to take urgent action to stop the further degradation of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary and to withdraw all exploration and mining licences within the ranges of Arkaroola.

*Letter to the Premier attached*

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Flinders Ranges SA

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**COPY**

The Hon Mike Rann MP  
The Premier of South Australia  
Minister for Sustainability and Climate Change  
GPO Box 2343  
Adelaide SA 5000

13 February 2008

Dear Mr Rann

### **Marathon operations at Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary**

Thank you for your swift action in suspending Marathon's exploration operations indefinitely after the charges against Marathon of unauthorised dumping of waste and contaminated materials were upheld.

You may remember that we signalled our concerns about Marathon's operations in our letter to you of 28 January 2008. We were already concerned about a pattern of behaviour that had emerged which, despite the company's rhetoric, had been cavalier at best and which had been characterised by ongoing breaches of agreed safety procedures and cooperative practices, of which we had advised PIRSA.

Given that Marathon has now admitted to this significant breach of their licence conditions, including the improper dumping 22,800 bags of low level radioactive material and general waste, the company's actions clearly belie the veracity of their repeated assurances concerning "commitment to the environment" and to "sustainable exploration". As similar controversial activities have occurred at other sites, eg at Hodgkinson in the summer of 2005-2006 and near the Myponga reservoir in 2006, we seriously question the future credibility of Marathon's exploration and mining practices. Operational procedures, rigorous supervision and inscrutable corporate integrity are surely required of any company granted an exploration licence in a Class A Environmental Zone. Instead, Marathon deliberately breached its licence conditions at two sites within the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. Accordingly, we request in the strongest terms, that you act immediately to put a permanent stop to the Mt Gee project by cancelling Marathon's licences and imposing a total ban on uranium exploration and mining within the ranges of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary before further damage and degradation occurs.

Mining in the heart of an internationally acclaimed wilderness sanctuary is inappropriate and clearly against the national interest. It threatens the unique nature of an area of geological and environmental significance that has been nurtured by the Sprigg family for over 40 years using carefully developed conservation management principles and practices. Allowing mining makes a mockery of Arkaroola's sanctuary status and its ecotourism credentials. Further, mining will sully the hard won reputation of Arkaroola as an innovative and multi-award winning ecotourism resort, which the SA State government recognises and proudly promotes. Arkaroola welcomes over 25,000 Australian and international

visitors annually. Over the past three years Arkaroola has won multiple South Australian Tourism Awards in the Sustainable Tourism, Ecotourism and Major Tourist Attraction categories and was inducted into the Hall of Fame for Ecotourism 2005-2007.

We are sure that you appreciate that Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary is an ecologically sensitive area where any man-made activity leaves a large and lasting footprint. Mining is anathema to its delicately balanced ecology, which is home to several threatened species, such as the yellow-footed rock wallaby, the spider wattle and the bell fruit tree. Furthermore, the region encompassing Arkaroola and the surrounding plains is seriously challenged with respect to ground water. A mining operation such as Marathon proposes (according to the company's estimates, using 20 times as much water as Heathgate currently uses at the nearby Beverley Uranium mine) would likely have dramatic consequences in this arid zone where recharge of aquifers is erratic at best and where the balance of surface and subsurface water is critical to the survival of plants and animals alike. Finally, mandated attempts to rehabilitate the degradation from mining operations will not guarantee regeneration to pre-disturbance condition, particularly as the effects of climate change are increasingly felt. It follows that mining in the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary will compromise sustainability targets outlined in South Australia's Strategic Plan.

Premier, we understand and appreciate that SA needs a mining economy to prosper. However, there are a number of other uranium finds and prospects in South Australia that are not located directly in the middle of a wilderness sanctuary and which do not have the concomitant costs of operating in an extremely sensitive environment. Evidence of a backlash against a uranium mine on the Sanctuary from current visitors has already emerged, representing a potentially significant impact on an exemplary ecotourism operation in the future. The cost of losing this unique gem is too high a price for the world community to pay for the benefit of a few shareholders. We urge you to ban mining in the ranges of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary.

Yours sincerely

Marg and Doug Sprigg