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Protesters slam Wiluna uranium plan

By Lloyd Jones, AAP

PROTESTERS including Goldfields representatives have slammed resources giant BHP Billiton's plans to mine uranium near Wiluna.

At the company's annual general meeting in Perth yesterday, Kado Muir, a traditional owner from the Yeelirrie area, told reporters his people wanted the WA Government to hold a public inquiry into the opening of uranium mines in the State, following 40 years of a virtual ban.

"We want to know what this landscape will be like at the end of this mine," Mr Muir said. "We want to ensure we can use the land for the next 40,000 years; that we will be living here.

"We don't want to be left with a toxic, radioactive outback.

"As far as traditional owners are concerned they do not want to have uranium mines in their backyards."

Yesterday conservation groups, unions and Aboriginal traditional owner groups voiced their environmental concerns at the Perth Convention and Exhibition centre. They raised particular concerns about BHP's proposed uranium mine at Yeelirrie.

Conservation Council of WA director Piers Verstegen said BHP had been acting behind the scenes to prevent a public inquiry from going ahead into uranium mining in WA.

He said serious issues related to the Yeelirrie proposal ranged from health impact and local communities through to the issue of whether WA uranium

would find its way into weapons programs in other countries like Russia and China.

"These issues have been swept under the table by both BHP and the State Government," Mr Verstegen said.

"This is an extremely damaging and dangerous industry. There's no such thing as a safe uranium mine anywhere in the world and we know that BHP will not be able to operate a safe uranium mine here."

Mr Verstegen said BHP's attempt to prevent a transparent public inquiry showed it did not have confidence in its ability to manage the environmental and health impacts of uranium mining.

Australian Conservation Foundation campaigner David Noonan said BHP would also face questions at its AGM about its plans for an open pit mine at Roxby Downs in South Australia.

He said the mine would leak three million litres of liquid radioactive waste a day until 2050.

"This practice is unacceptable in Australia in this day and age. We need an Australian Erin Brockovich to expose what's going on here," Mr Noonan said.

Unions WA spokeswoman Linda Morich said her union opposed uranium mining in the State because of safety concerns for workers and nearby communities.

"There's no safe dose of radiation; there's no safe uranium mines," she said.

To coincide with the AGM in Perth, smaller protest rallies were held outside BHP Billiton officers around Australia.