

Traditional owners hope for uranium mine u-turn

■ Joanna Delalande

A group of traditional owners are crossing their fingers a Supreme Court of Appeals decision will go their way and prevent a project that would see the State's first uranium mine opened in the northern Goldfields.

It comes after the Conservation Council of WA lost an appeal, last month, against the approval for the controversial Yeelirrie uranium mine 420km north-west of Kalgoorlie.

WA chief justice Wayne Martin dismissed the contention that environmental approval by former WA Environment Minister Albert Jacob late in the former Liberal-Nationals Government's term was wrong at law.

The Conservation Council of WA and Environment Minister Stephen Dawson each presented their case before Justices Michael Buss, Andrew Beech and Janine Pritchard in the Supreme Court of Appeals yesterday, with a judgment expected to be handed down in coming months.

Three Yeelirrie women who flew from Kalgoorlie-Boulder for the occasion were present at the hearing, as well as a dozen people from the conservationist group Walkatjurra Walkabout, who held a picnic at Supreme Court Gardens to show their support.

Traditional owners Shirley

Wonyabong, Elizabeth Wonyabong and Vicky Abdullah travelled to the courtroom to try to defend their country and community from what they considered to be an "unwanted" uranium project.

Ms Abdullah told the Kalgoorlie Miner yesterday she hoped this would be the final step required to stop the uranium mine from going ahead.

She said she felt confident CCWA's case was strong and they had competent lawyers on their side.

Ms Abdullah stood by her previous comments that she and her fellow traditional owners would continue to fight, saying the Supreme Court decision last month was not the end of the campaign to prevent uranium mining in WA.

The State Labor Government agreed last year that it would not renege on any approvals issued by the previous government covering existing uranium proposals, despite its own policy opposing the mining of the commodity.

The decision means Cameco's Yeelirrie and Kintyre, Toro Energy's Wiluna and Vimy Resources' Mulga Rock projects can proceed.

The Federal Government said last year it would hold off on making a decision on the approval of the mine until an appeal against a State Government decision to give it the green light is completed.