

Rio Tinto welcomes moves to strengthen cultural heritage protection

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Rio Tinto welcomes the release today of a joint Commonwealth Government and First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance Discussion Paper designed to strengthen state and federal cultural heritage protection laws.

Rio Tinto supports strengthening safeguards for cultural heritage at both state and Commonwealth legislative levels, including the reform process currently underway to ensure an incident like the destruction of rock shelters at Juukan Gorge in Western Australia never happens again.

These reforms must ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are placed at the centre of decision-making on matters relating to protection of their cultural heritage.

Rio Tinto Chief Executive, Australia Kellie Parker said "We have heard the call for Rio Tinto to play a greater role in the strengthening of state and Commonwealth cultural heritage protection laws.

"This call has been made by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Committee that inquired into the destruction of the Juukan Gorge rock shelters, Traditional Owners, the National Native Title Council, the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance, and our investors. The call is reinforced in the Dhawura Ngilan Vision Statement.

"We firmly believe a co-design process with Traditional Owners will strengthen cultural heritage management and protection to ensure it is valued and celebrated for its intrinsic worth.

"There are and will be differences in views on how this will be best achieved but we will continue to work in close consultation with Traditional Owners and their representative organisations to better understand and protect their cultural heritage and ensure mining is done in the right way."

Last month, Rio Tinto developed a joint management plan with the Yinhawangka Aboriginal Corporation in Western Australia. This plan ensures the protection of significant social and cultural heritage values, as part of the proposed development of the Western Range iron ore project in the Pilbara. It is the result of a strong collaboration between the Yinhawangka people and Rio Tinto.

Kellie Parker said: "Our determination not to repeat the events leading up to the destruction of the Juukan Gorge rock shelters is ingrained in everything we do.

"Significant changes continue to be made at all levels of our business. While we are hopeful we have put in place the right foundations for a better future, we know we will be judged by our actions and not our words."

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Contact

Please direct all enquiries to media.enquiries@riotinto.com

Media Relations, UK

Illtud Harri
M +44 7920 503 600

David Outhwaite
M +44 7787 597 493

Media Relations, Americas

Matthew Klar
T +1 514 608 4429

Media Relations, Australia

Jonathan Rose
M +61 447 028 913

Matt Chambers
M +61 433 525 739

Jesse Riseborough
M +61 436 653 412

Investor Relations, UK

Menno Sanderse
M: +44 7825 195 178

David Ovington
M +44 7920 010 978

Clare Peever
M +44 7788 967 877

Investor Relations, Australia

Amar Jambaa
M +61 472 865 948

Rio Tinto plc

6 St James's Square
London SW1Y 4AD
United Kingdom

T +44 20 7781 2000
Registered in England
No. 719885

Rio Tinto Limited

Level 7, 360 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000
Australia

T +61 3 9283 3333
Registered in Australia
ABN 96 004 458 404

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