

# Rio Legacy Questioned

July 15, 2016

This year marks 50 years of Rio Tinto in the Pilbara.

Rio's first iron ore mine at Mount Tom Price commenced way back in 1966. The Mount Tom Price mine has been operating ever since and has been the mainstay of Rio's operations in the Pilbara.

Today Rio Tinto has sixteen iron ore mines in the Pilbara, earning billions of dollars for their shareholders. It is not widely known that Rio do not pay royalties to the acknowledged native title holders on about six of these mines because they were established before the Commonwealth Native Title Act came into being in 1994.

At a function in Tom Price last night as part of Rio's 50 year celebration, three Eastern Guruma Elders gave an Acknowledgement of Country.

The following is a statement prepared by the Corporation for this event.

Our old people walked on this land, lived on this land and this land provided the resources we needed to survive for thousands of years.

In the context of this history this land has created a legacy that has allowed my people to survive here since long before the ice age.

Today Rio Tinto is celebrating 50 years of mining on Eastern Guruma traditional lands.

We are standing here today as Elders, Mothers, Grandmothers and proud Traditional Owners.

We are talking as members of Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation. Wintawari holds the native title rights on behalf of the Eastern Guruma people. It is like our governing body. It is the only corporation in Australian law that can authorize native title consent for impacts on our country. Without Wintawari consent no Government or company has a social licence to operate on our land.

We also have a history with the mining of this area, as children growing up watching all the activity happening on our country. Our parents and grandparents lived and worked on Hamersley Station and saw many of the changes on the land. Our country has changed a lot as a result of mining.

There have been many other changes such as name changes for places on our country. Mining Companies did not ask us the names of the hills and places but made up names that the elders did not know - which confused and upset them.

Over the last generation or two, most of our people have been forced off country and now live in Karratha and Roebourne. The opportunities for our people to work and live back on country are limited.

One of our Elders lived on Hamersley Station for 60 years and when Hamersley was sold he became unemployed at 60 years of age and was not able to get work again. This Elder and his whole family were forced to leave their country and the home that Lang Hancock had built for him and go in live in Karratha. The house at Hamersley was later demolished when the lease changed hands again.

We have an Indigenous Land Use Agreement with Rio Tinto which should enable us and Rio to talk about matters such as contracts and employment but currently this is not working.

We have had several people apply for jobs and not get them and people from other areas are being employed. Our aim is to ensure our men and women are working. But Rio seem to make traditional owner employment more difficult than they need to. There are too many rules, too many processes and not enough genuine desire. Just last week, a member of the group applied for a trainee position and was told that there were better applicants. This person was qualified and had worked in this position for another mining company. What would have been better than to train an Eastern Guruma person for a job on their land.

Unfortunately, we cannot stand here today and welcome you to country when our people are worse off than when no mining existed. We are not being paid compensation for three Rio Tinto mines operating on our country. We are not being employed. We are not getting the contracts and business opportunities that the mining industry prides itself on. Outcomes for the Eastern Guruma people have been poor.

We are not being respected for our decisions to protect country. Rio always wants us to consent to the destruction of our country for mining so that Rio can make more money for its shareholders.

None of us know exactly how much money Rio Tinto has made from mining our traditional country. We do know not that Rio Tinto revenues from mining iron ore in the Pilbara was US\$34 Billion just in the last two years, and that they made over US\$12 billion in earnings from Pilbara iron ore during that same two year period.

As traditional owners we want to challenge Rio to do the right thing, to adopt a real social licence.

The power is in Rio's hands to ensure justice, to create jobs, to create business opportunities, to enable us to create a good future for our young people full of opportunity and choice. You have the power to make a real difference to our people.

We are standing here as Elders, looking back on our past. We are trying to hold on to the things that are important to us as a People. We are standing in the middle also looking forward.

We are trying to bring opportunities that will keep our young people strong and proud of who we are. As we hold on to these things that are important to us, we want to build a better future for our people.

The challenge is for Rio to walk with us side by side to create this legacy together.