

NATIVE TITLE IN THE KIMBERLEY – FROM A MINING PERSPECTIVE

On 2 October 2002, Bruce Larson gave Kimberley Society some promotional details of his company; Rio Tinto. It is a very large organisation with 34,000 employees worldwide. It has strong policies regarding indigenous affairs and environmental matters. It is structured around world wide commodity operations.

The Chairman, Sir Robert Wilson, is based in London. In 1995 CRA and RTZ combined operations to form Rio Tinto to provide a more efficient organisation to compete internationally. Whilst in Australia, exploration and WA operations are based in Perth and those principally of bauxite and alumina are based in Brisbane. All other operations are based in London. Australian (45%) and North American (40%) assets dominate, the remaining 15% being located in South America, Indonesia, Europe and Africa. Assets total \$13 billion. Rio Tinto is third behind BHP Billiton and Alcoa in market capitalisation of mining companies. Sales to North America dominate at 28% with Europe 23% and Japan 22% making up the bulk of the rest. Turnover amounts to \$10 billion annually with a profit of \$2.2 billion.

The Headquarters of Rio Tinto operations in WA: Rio Tinto Iron Ore, are centred in Perth. There are 4000 employees in WA conducting 20% of the Rio Tinto worldwide operations. Iron ore comes from several mines in the Pilbara. Salt is produced at Lake McLeod, Dampier and Port Hedland.

Argyle Diamond in the Kimberley is the largest diamond mine in Australia, producing mainly commercial diamonds. Present Argyle operations will continue until 2007 and then could continue until 2020 by going underground.

Rio Tinto reached an agreement with local Aboriginal groups over 20 years ago when Argyle was first being developed. This agreement is currently being renegotiated with the traditional owners and their legal representatives, the Kimberley Land Council. At present 13% of Argyle's employees are indigenous.

Diamond exploration is continuing within the Kimberley area. Mitchell Plateau bauxite is awaiting the right economic climate for development.

In all areas across Australia, Rio Tinto undertakes heritage surveys before they conduct any exploration or land disturbing activity to ensure all Aboriginal sites and areas of cultural significance are protected. In areas where mines are operating or being developed, Rio Tinto will negotiate agreements with the traditional owners. This approach is based on the Rio Tinto good neighbour policy and provides such benefits as health, education, training and employment opportunities. Sporting programs are also well supported with the Rio Tinto group of companies within Australia.

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