



MEDIA RELEASE

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THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF DESTRUCTION AT JUUKAN GORGE

Today marks three years since Rio Tinto destroyed one of the most important places to the Puutu Kunti Kurrama People, Juukan Gorge.

The events of May 24, 2020, which triggered a Senate Inquiry and a Board Review into Rio Tinto's heritage management, were distressing to the PKKP community and will remain that way for their lifetimes.

The PKKP Aboriginal Corporation wishes to highlight the positive work Traditional Owners have been doing over the past few years in an attempt to make amends for the destruction.

Chairperson of the Puutu Kunti Kurrama Land Committee, Burchell Hayes says this is a sad day for all Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura People, and the devastating loss will never be recovered.

"The destruction of our most significant cultural heritage site should not have happened, and to ensure that we will never experience this senseless feeling of loss and devastation in the future, we are driven towards achieving a co-management process of Country with mining companies," Mr Hayes said.

"We have already started to see minor aspects of the co-management model working at Juukan Gorge, through rehabilitation works of some of the surrounding areas," he said.

In the aftermath, the PKKP Aboriginal Corporation established a committee as a mechanism to communicate and recommend the desired rehabilitation and remediation outcomes at Juukan Gorge with Rio Tinto.

The committee has asked Rio Tinto to rehabilitate the surrounding areas in line of sight from a standpoint at Juukan-2 to its pre-mining landscape.

"We are now three years on from this destructive mining incident and the remediation works are starting to take shape," Mr Hayes said.

Recent rehabilitation activities have seen the commencement of seeding and replanting in the area to revegetate the Juukan Gorge landscape with native plants.

"Overall, we are pleased with the rehabilitation and remediation works that have since occurred through the committee's instructions and directions, but in saying this, nothing will make up for the destruction at Juukan Gorge," Mr Hayes said.



THE PKKP ABORIGINAL
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“While the PKKP Aboriginal Corporation recognises Rio Tinto’s efforts to reset and re-build relationships, our expectations haven’t changed.

“We have always said that we are not opposed to mining, but it needs to be done in the right way, involving Traditional Owners, and first of all, gaining our free, prior and informed consent.

“As Traditional Owners, the PKKP People can co-exist with companies that wish to impact our traditional country but the best path forward for these mining companies is stepping up to the co-management agreement,” Mr Hayes said.

Director of Land and Heritage Management at PKKP Aboriginal Corporation, Dr Jordan Ralph says the new *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act*, combined with the co-management approach to heritage, means that we are less likely to see repeat instances of heritage destruction.

“The previous legislation and approach to heritage approvals was never fit for purpose and they did not afford Aboriginal people any agency over what happens on their Country.

“We have a long way to go, but our new way of working certainly elevates Traditional Owner authority and decision-making closer to where it should be,” Dr Jordan said.

The PKKP Aboriginal Corporation has launched a heritage project at the site of the rock shelter to recover the remaining archaeological deposit and cultural material.

Terry Hayes, Puutu Kunti Kurrama Traditional Owner, and Lead Excavation Specialist is overseeing the project.

Terry Hayes says the work he and other Traditional Owners have been doing the last three years has a lot of personal meaning for him and the broader PKKP community.

“The excavation and rehabilitation project is important for our younger people who are coming through,” Mr Hayes said.

“We have been clear from the beginning that we want to get the rest of our cultural material out of that site so we can protect it for future generations.

“It is important they have something here that they can have to themselves and so we can move past the anger with Rio Tinto.

“We want an area that’s our own that we can pass on to our younger people so they can think their Elders did enough to fix it,” Mr Hayes said.