

# Aboriginal group urges mining 'reset' after ancient site destroyed

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Anglo-Australian mining giant Rio Tinto sparked outrage after destroying Indigenous rock shelters at Juukan Gorge in Australia's ore-rich Pilbara region in May

Aboriginal landowners have called for a "reset" in Australia's lucrative

mining sector after an inquiry pilloried Rio Tinto for blowing up a 46,000-year-old heritage site to expand an iron ore mine.

Rio sparked outrage after destroying caves, known as rock shelters, at Juukan Gorge in Australia's ore-rich Pilbara region in May—against the wishes of the Indigenous Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (PKKP) people of Western Australia.

An Australian parliamentary inquiry recommended late Wednesday that the Anglo-Australian mining giant pay restitution to the PKKP, rebuild the destroyed site and commit to a permanent moratorium on mining in the area.

The [preliminary report](#) also recommended that all [mining companies](#) operating in Western Australia review agreements with Indigenous traditional landowners and halt any planned destruction of heritage sites until [legal protections](#) are bolstered.

PKKP Aboriginal Corporation spokesman Burchell Hayes said that the group welcomed the inquiry's findings.

"The destruction of Juukan Gorge was a global disaster that hit at the hearts of the PKKP people and the greater community," he said.

"We hope the inquiry's preliminary findings prompt a fundamental reset of the sector, particularly in the relationships between Traditional Owners and mining companies; and pave a way forward for more equal partnerships fostered by greater respect and mutual benefit."

Rio Tinto said it was committed to "never again" destroying culturally significant sites and was working to modernise existing agreements with Indigenous groups as well as rehabilitating the Juukan Gorge area and building a facility to store artefacts removed from the site.

The company said it would review the inquiry's recommendations "in the coming days".

"We recognise the destruction of the Juukan rock shelters caused significant pain to the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura people and we are working very hard to progress a remedy with them," said Rio Tinto chairman Simon Thompson.

Though Rio Tinto had permission from the state government to blast in the area, the PKKP have said they warned that the placement of some explosives would destroy two heritage [rock shelters](#).

A public backlash and investor revolt forced the [mining](#) giant's CEO and two top officials to resign in September.

The [site](#) had contained some of the oldest Aboriginal artefacts ever found in Australia and was considered sacred by the PKKP.

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