

Rio Tinto Limited and Bougainville Copper Limited facing multi-billion dollar class action lawsuit

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 22 May 2024: Lawyers representing over 3,000 residents of Bougainville, an island of Papua New Guinea, have filed a class action lawsuit against Rio Tinto and Bougainville Copper, seeking compensation, expected to be in the billions of dollars, for historical mismanagement of the Panguna Copper Mine, which caused large scale environmental and social harm.

Mining ceased in 1989 when disputes at the mine spiralled into a civil war lasting for ten years. Neither Rio Tinto nor BCL ever undertook, nor have they committed to undertaking, any form of environmental or social impacts remediation.

The class action is made up of a majority of villagers in the affected region of Bougainville and has the confirmed support of 71 local clan leaders. Those leaders have written to Rio Tinto and BCL to explain, in human terms, the effects of Rio Tinto's and BCL's activities on their homeland.

The class action seeks compensation for the i) environmental damage caused to the area and ii) loss and damage suffered by the villagers living in the affected region.

Rio Tinto and BCL are urged to engage with the legal representatives of the class in order to rapidly bring to a close over 50 years of suffering inflicted on the people of Bougainville.

Martin Miriori, the lead claimant of the class action suit and Paramount Chief of the Basikang Taingku clan, commented: "My community's lives have been uprooted and devastated by the Panguna Copper Mine operations. Our once crystal-clear rivers, fertile food gardens, and sacred sites have been destroyed, and our livelihoods have been irreversibly damaged. We demand compensation for the environmental destruction and profound loss and suffering endured by the villagers. It is time for Rio Tinto and Bougainville Copper to address the harm their reckless actions have caused to our land and our people."

ENDS.

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Notes to Editors

1. Details of the claim and associated materials including images and videos of the affected lands and peoples can be found at: <https://www.pangunamineaction.com>
2. Solicitors for the plaintiff and class members are Goodwin Bidar Nutley Lawyers, of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and Morris Mennilli, of Sydney, Australia.
3. Bougainville Copper Limited (as it is now known) (“BCL”) operated the Panguna Copper Mine (“Panguna Mine”) between 1971 and 1989, during which period Rio Tinto was the controlling shareholder in BCL. Operations at Panguna Mine saw the disposal of tailings and other waste products often directly into the Jaba-Kawerong river system and associated valleys, at huge scale for many years. During production, approximately 90,000 to 120,000 tonnes of waste rock and approximately 80,000 to 140,000 tonnes of tailings were produced by the Panguna Mine each day.
4. Panguna Mine, Google Maps ref: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/QEckPeHj1byYgcCb8>