

Rio Tinto Faces Class Action Over Bougainville Mine Impact

Mining at the Panguna copper pit ended in 1989 when militants forced the operation to shut down

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Lawyers representing more than 3,000 residents of Bougainville filed the class-action lawsuit against Rio Tinto and Bougainville Copper seeking compensation. PHOTO: PATRICK T. FALLON/REUTERS

A class action against Rio Tinto has been filed in a Papua New Guinea court in relation to a long-shuttered copper mine that it offloaded in 2016 and was at the center of a decadelong civil war.

Mining at the Panguna copper pit on the South Pacific island of Bougainville ended in 1989 when militants forced the operation to shut down. Nearly three decades later, Rio Tinto handed over its almost 54% holding in operator [Bougainville Copper BOC](#) -

4.92% decrease; red down pointing triangle to be distributed between Papua New Guinea and Bougainville.

Lawyers representing more than 3,000 residents of Bougainville filed the class-action lawsuit against Rio Tinto and Bougainville Copper seeking compensation, citing allegations of environmental damage and losses to villagers living in the area.

“We are reviewing the details of the claim,” a Rio Tinto spokesperson said in emailed remarks Thursday. “As this is an ongoing legal matter, we are unable to comment further at this time.”

In 2021, Rio Tinto agreed with residents of Bougainville to an independent assessment of the legacy impact of the Panguna copper mine. That work has been ongoing since 2022 and the company is awaiting the results in order to understand the environmental and social impacts of the mine since operations ended, the spokesperson said.

“We demand compensation for the environmental destruction and profound loss and suffering endured by the villagers,” Martin Miriori of the Basikang Taingku clan and the lead claimant of the class-action suit said in a statement.

Bougainville Copper separately said it intends to vigorously defend its position.

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