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Sustainable Minerals Institute

Statement: Mining and the Loss of Cultural Heritage in the Pilbara

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The [Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining \(CSRSM\)](#), has a 10-year Research Partnership Agreement with [Rio Tinto](#) to conduct social research on issues of mutual interest. As with other observers, we were shocked by recent events in the Pilbara and the loss of significant cultural heritage through the destruction of ancient and sacred Aboriginal caves in Pilbara's Juukan Gorge.

Given our research engagement with Rio Tinto on issues of [cultural heritage](#), [agreement making](#) and [human rights](#), Rio Tinto's choice to destroy such significant cultural heritage has been deeply disappointing for staff and students at the Centre.

We note [Rio Tinto's apology](#), and their recognition of the distress they caused the Puutu Kunti Kurama and Pinikura Peoples, and support their announcement of a review about what went wrong. We support [Reconciliation Australia's](#) call that the company must be transparent about the review findings and shares lessons with the wider public.

We are encouraged by the [Australian Senate's announcement of a national inquiry](#) on these events.

Indigenous peoples enter into negotiated agreements with mining companies for land use, including cultural heritage protection. These agreements are usually confidential and, as such, the extent of the cultural heritage loss is not widely known.

These events have created public awareness of the 'managed destruction' of cultural heritage to make way for mining – revealing inequalities in our regulatory systems, and the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples as they seek to protect their cultural heritage.

CSRSM is focused on understanding the social and political challenges brought about by resource extraction. In an effort to drive change in the sector, [our research](#) is issues-focused and constructively critical. We engage with industry under strict conditions embedded in UQ's research partnership agreements that maintain our academic independence.

We will continue to work with industry partners, rights holders, government agencies and other stakeholders to ensure that in working to understand the effect of industry activities, they consider the intensity of impacts in particular locations, and the cumulative impacts of mining over time.

CSRSM was recently awarded an [Australian Research Council Linkage grant](#) to specifically look at how companies respond to their stakeholders when public pressure mounts, and the degree to which they are prepared to understand their role in causing harm, and share those insights with the public. We will follow the Rio Tinto review and national inquiry processes closely.