Helen Karyuka, an Aurukun local and Wik-Waya Traditional Owner, is realising her aspirations of working on country whilst taking steps to build her career as part of Rio Tinto’s Amrun project.

Helen has broken new ground by being the first Wik-Waya Traditional Owner to reside in the community and maintain full-time employment on the Amrun project with her role as a Surveyors Assistant with MinStaff Survey.

Ms Karyuka said “I like sharing the stories about our country passed onto me by my Dad, Tony Kerindun. The people I work with listen to me and they want to know about the land and the Wik-Waya culture.”

“Our ancestors, the old people, look after me when I’m on country. They’re with me always and I feel them when I come back to Aurukun. Staying connected to the land helps me to maintain my understanding of our traditional knowledge, including the medicines and healing practices of the Wik-Waya people.

“The work I’m doing lets me combine having a full-time job with working on country, which is really important to me.”

Helen Karyuka, Wik-Waya Traditional Owner

50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaged to work on the project including 27 Local Aboriginal People and 13 Wik-Waya Traditional owners.

The Amrun project has provided opportunities for me to work in different casual roles on country over the past few years. Over time my goals grew to wanting to gain full-time work and qualifications, which I’m now working to achieve, and who knows what the future holds.”

Helen’s journey to working as a Surveyors Assistant started four years ago, with being nominated under the Western Cape Communities Co-existence Agreement (WCCCA) to participate in cultural heritage works as part of the feasibility studies for the Amrun project.

She transitioned to more regular casual engagements working on country as part of the land and sea management programme when the Amrun project commenced late last year, before starting as a Surveyors Assistance in February this year.