Cultural camps help understand and deliver Amrun commitments

Following the Amrun funding announcement at the end of 2015, Rio Tinto Weipa employees and Project representatives have been working with Traditional Owners around managing country in a way that meets business and cultural aspirations.

In the years leading up to Amrun’s approval, the business spent a considerable amount of time on country talking with Traditional Owners about the potential changes to the landscape as part of the new mine. This helped to identify areas that were significant and plan for how we could manage the impact together when the project came to its development phase.

These efforts culminated into the development of the CHEMP (Communities, Heritage and Environment Management Plan) which was endorsed by Traditional Owners in 2014 and built into the project’s final feasibility study.

With construction well underway, implementation of the CHEMP with our community partners, including Wik-Waya Traditional Owners and our Agreements, is a key part of the business’ approach to Communities & Social Performance. Supporting the implementation of the CHEMP, are cultural camps that are held on Country each year at the Amban Outstation, which is an important meeting place for Wik-Waya Traditional Owners.

“I feel fortunate that my elders have passed on knowledge to me about several story and special places around the Amban area. It’s important I continue to share this knowledge on country to my family and the younger generations, and holding these camps supports me in doing this.”

Tony Kerindan, Senior Wik-Waya Traditional Owner

Senior Wik-Waya Traditional Owner, Tony Kerindan at Amban Outstation (July 2016).
Just some of the activities that have been undertaken on these cultural camps include cultural site mapping, videography and soundscaping so accurate records of the landscape can be kept as a baseline to track changes in the country over time. These records will also support the passing on of cultural knowledge from elders to younger Wik-Waya generations in a visual way.

The camps also allow Traditional Owners to teach senior operational and project leaders about their unique connection to country and broader ambitions for working with Rio Tinto. Each year a group of school kids from Aurukun attend the camp in the September school holidays. This helps to support Traditional Owner aspirations to pass on knowledge and traditions to younger generations, and encourage young local Aboriginal people to pursue higher education pathways and understand the connection between STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects and the opportunities to work on Country in the fields of archaeology and ecology.

Many Senior Rio Tinto Projects leaders say that working on projects which see them turn vast open spaces into profitable operations presents some of the greatest challenges and biggest rewards.

Keith Nugent, managing director – Aluminium Projects, says it is this opportunity to not only do some seriously important work for the organisation, but at the same time leave a lasting legacy in a community that is so attractive. “We know we have a responsibility to the land. The camp is a rich and deep experience, giving us a much deeper knowledge of the land we are building the operations on.”

“These cultural camps are a great example of how working with our community stakeholders can deliver a better project at the end of the day that meets both business and stakeholder objectives.”

“These cultural camps have given us Wik-Waya Traditional Owners an opportunity to share why certain areas are culturally significant and what they mean to us and our elders.”

Loyla Chevathen, chair of the Western Cape Communities Trust and Wik-Waya Traditional Owner