Rio Tinto celebrates 60 years in Western Australia

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Rio Tinto is today celebrating 60 years in Western Australia, marking the anniversary of the first shipment of iron ore from Dampier to Japan.

The shipment departed on 22 August 1966 aboard the ship Houn Maru, following a landmark agreement with Japanese steel mills to buy 65.5 million tonnes of iron ore over 15 years. At the time, it was the largest export deal in Australia's history, and gave the commercial certainty needed to develop the Pilbara.

Six decades on, the Pilbara has become one of the world's premier mining regions and the engine room of the national economy.

This growth would not have been possible without support from Traditional Owners, whose connection to Country stretches back tens of thousands of years, and the hard work and ingenuity of generations of employees. The milestone is also underpinned by partnership, with communities, governments, joint venture partners, customers and suppliers helping shape Rio Tinto's iron ore business.

More than 8 billion tonnes of iron ore from Rio Tinto's Pilbara operations have been shipped to customers globally, helping create the steel that has shaped the modern world. From the construction of buildings and homes to transport and energy infrastructure.

Rio Tinto is now one of the largest private sector employers in Western Australia, with operations connected to six residential towns in the Pilbara and, through its regional fly-in fly-out program, five other regional towns, from the Kimberley to the Mid-West, South-West and Great Southern. That footprint extends to Perth, home to the company's remote operations centre and headquarters of its global iron ore business.

As Rio Tinto's iron ore business has grown, so has its contribution to Western Australia.

In the last five years, Rio Tinto has invested about half a billion dollars in community initiatives across the state, building on decades of investment in regional communities.

In 2025, the company spent a record A$12 billion with Western Australian businesses, with its spend on local supply chains doubling over the past four years.

Rio Tinto Iron Ore Chief Executive Matthew Holcz said: "Our story in Western Australia began in the Pilbara, which remains the heart of our iron ore business.

"As we mark 60 years in Western Australia, we reflect on the people who came before us - whose hard work laid the foundations for the business we have today and for the future we are building.

"We could never have built this business alone. We thank the generations of employees, Traditional Owners, communities, governments, joint venture partners, customers and suppliers who have built it with us.

"While we reflect the past, we also turn to the future. We plan to be in Western Australia for decades to come, helping create further opportunities for future generations of Western Australians."

To mark the milestone anniversary, a collection of photographs from the late Richard Woldendorp will be

gifted to the State Library of Western Australia, adding to the significant collection of Woldendorp photographs already held by the library.

Donated by Richard's wife, Lyn Woldendorp, and digitised by Rio Tinto, the collection preserves the work of the renowned photographer, who was commissioned by Hamersley Iron in the 1960s to document the construction of the Mount Tom Price mine and the early development of the Pilbara.

In partnership with the Perth Wildcats, Rio Tinto will also celebrate its 60th anniversary with Pilbara communities and its employees, in a historic pre-season basketball game, when the Perth Wildcats take on the Cairns Taipans in Karratha today (22 August). It will be the first official NBL game to be played in the Pilbara, and alongside the game, Wildcats players and coaches will connect with the local community through clinics for close to 500 junior basketballers and coaching development sessions.

Notes:

A timeline of Rio Tinto's history in Western Australia is available here.

Rio Tinto's 60th Anniversary video is available here.

Historic video and photographs are available for media use. Please contact the media team for access to these files.

View source version on businesswire.com: https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20260821913616/en/

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