

## Rio Tinto

# CULTIVATING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND LEARNING

**Rio Tinto's 25-year-old Argyle diamond mine in Western Australia is located in an area of major spiritual significance for traditional landowners of the region. In 2001, it was recognized by both sides that a more formal relationship was needed and a wider set of indigenous communities engaged by the company. This triggered the engagement that resulted in the Argyle Diamond Mine Participation Agreement being signed in 2004.**



Many of the early meetings between Rio Tinto's representatives and the traditional owners had no formal agenda. According to participants at these meetings, Argyle diamond mine personnel made a point of listening to the traditional owners and apologizing for mistakes of the past and committing to a relationship built on openness, mutual respect and partnership.

To achieve this, it was imperative that engagement with the communities was in terms that were clearly understood by the traditional owners. Members of the communities were taken on site tours, including the underground mine. A number of visual aids were used to explain the impact of the mining activity on the surrounding area, and translators were used to ensure that everyone could follow and participate in the negotiations.

Ten years on from the signing of the agreement, the same level of input is put into ensuring effective communication.

In a reciprocal process, the traditional owners provided the company with information about their customs and performed ceremonies to ensure that the mining operation could be conducted safely and free from interruption by ancestral spirits. The Manthe is a ceremony that both welcomes people to the country and makes them safe while they are on the Argyle site. It is still regularly conducted on-site for employees, contractors and visitors.



The Manthe is a ceremony where the Gija and Mirriwong Traditional Owners welcome all staff and contractors to country and ensure their physical and spiritual safety. The Gija ceremony is a smoking ceremony and the Mirriwong ceremony is a water ceremony.