

Panguna Mine: 5,000 claimants join class action lawsuit against Rio Tinto and Bougainville Copper Limited

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 19 August 2024:

Another significant milestone has been reached as over 5,000 claimants have now joined the class action lawsuit against Rio Tinto and Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL). The class action has gained substantial support from communities throughout the river valley downstream from the Panguna Mine, a region that has been devastated by its operations and subsequent abandonment.

While some individuals continue to support the Panguna Mine Legacy Impact Assessment, concerns have been raised about the independence of that process given the funding connections Rio Tinto has to the study and the fact that the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) is a substantial shareholder of BCL, which is a defendant in the class action.

Last week, Rio Tinto and BCL entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the ABG. The MOU provides for the undertaking of works on ageing mine infrastructure.

Referring to the MOU, the lead plaintiff in the class action Martin Miriori likened it to Rio donating a packet of band aids to the local community: “Does Rio seriously think that we are going to thank them? We have lived in this lunar landscape for over 50 years without safe drinking water. The class members seek the resolution of their claims through the Court system. We are asking the Court to award compensation for past wrongs and damages to pay for the comprehensive remediation of the river valley.”

The claimants are eagerly anticipating the first case management hearing on 10 October 2024 in Port Moresby, to be presided over by The Honourable Deputy Chief Justice Kandakasi, CBE.

ENDS.

Media enquiries

Morris Mennilli

info@m2law.com.au

+61 2 8880 1016

Notes to Editors

1. Details of the claim and associated materials including images and videos of the affected lands and peoples can be found at: <https://www.pangunamineaction.com>
2. Solicitors for the plaintiff and class members are Goodwin Bidar Nutley Lawyers, of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and Morris Mennilli, of Sydney, Australia.
3. Bougainville Copper Limited (as it is now known) (“BCL”) operated the Panguna Copper Mine (“Panguna Mine”) between 1971 and 1989, during which period Rio Tinto was the controlling shareholder in BCL. Operations at Panguna Mine saw the disposal of tailings and other waste products often directly into the Jaba-Kawerong river system and associated valleys, at huge scale for many years. During production, approximately 90,000 to 120,000 tonnes of waste rock and approximately 80,000 to 140,000 tonnes of tailings were produced by the Panguna Mine each day.
4. Panguna Mine, Google Maps ref: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/QECkPeHj1byYgcCb8>