



# Northern Land Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Breakthrough in NT's backlog of exploration applications**

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The Northern Land Council and major mining company Rio Tinto have negotiated a template agreement that has the potential to clear the way for Rio Tinto's exploration plans for nearly 31,000 square kilometres of native title land in the Top End of the Northern Territory.

The agreement could also become the model to speed up applications for exploration licences (ELAs) over at least another 135,000 square kilometres of land. Altogether, this covers about 80 per cent of all land in the Top End that is subject to Native Title ELAs.

This represents a major breakthrough in the backlog problem that has put mining companies' exploration plans on hold for several years, ever since the former NT Government stopped processing licence applications in 1996.

About 67.5 per cent of Native Title land available in the NLC region is subject to exploration licence applications.

The template agreement between Rio Tinto and the NLC is over 47 existing applications across the Top End and all future Rio Tinto applications. It guarantees Indigenous site protection, community benefits including employment and training opportunities and strong environmental protection for all exploration projects undertaken by Rio Tinto.

NLC Chairman Mr Galarrwuy Yunupingu said the intention was to take the template agreement to the next NLC Full Council meeting in May/June for approval, followed by regional meetings with relevant native title holders.

"This agreement shows what can be done when interested parties come to the table and talk to each other," Mr Yunupingu said.

"Rio Tinto has acknowledged the need for native title holders to be consulted and to be satisfied they have a fair deal – and they obviously want to get through the red tape as quickly as possible. This template, setting out significant guidelines and conditions, is a very good way to make sure that consultations proceed quickly and contain benefits for everyone."

Mr Yunupingu said he was hopeful the template would be adopted by other mining companies in the NT. "We have had discussions with the NT Minister for Resource Development and now look forward to working with the NT in developing a more systematic way of releasing the ELAs which will help expedite all Native Title mining matters."