



# Clearing Permit Decision Report

## 1. Application details

### 1.1. Permit application details

Permit application No.: 4893/2  
Permit type: Purpose

### 1.2. Proponent details

Proponent's name: Rio Tinto Exploration Pty Limited

### 1.3. Property details

Property: Iron Ore (Mt Bruce) Agreement Act 1972, Mineral Lease 252SA (AML 70/252)  
Local Government Area: Shire of Ashburton  
Colloquial name: Munjina Project

### 1.4. Application

Clearing Area (ha)	No. Trees	Method of Clearing	For the purpose of:
63		Mechanical	Mineral Exploration

### 1.5. Decision on application

Decision on Permit Application: Grant  
Decision Date: 27 June 2013

## 2. Site Information

### 2.1. Existing environment and information

#### 2.1.1. Description of the native vegetation under application

**Vegetation Description** Beard vegetation associations have been mapped for the whole of Western Australia. One Beard vegetation association has been mapped within the application area (Government of Western Australia, 2013; GIS Database):

82: Hummock grasslands, low tree steppe; snappy gum over *Triodia wiseana*.

Flora and vegetation surveys were conducted over the original application area and amended application area by botanists from ENV Australia in January 2012 and April/May 2013 respectively (ENV Australia, 2012; 2013). Vegetation descriptions were provided for each of the proposed drill pad locations. The vegetation was generally described as *Corymbia ferritcola* subsp. *ferritcola*, *C. hamersleyana* and/or *Eucalyptus leucophloia* subsp. *leucophloia* low open woodland over *Triodia* spp. open hummock grassland on a pediment landform (ENV Australia, 2012; 2013). Many sites contained *Eucalyptus gamophylla* scattered mallees and/or *Acacia* spp. open shrubland (ENV Australia, 2012; 2013).

**Clearing Description** Rio Tinto Exploration Pty Limited (Rio Tinto) has applied to clear up to 63 hectares of native vegetation within an application area of approximately 557 hectares for the purpose of mineral exploration. Clearing will be for drill pads, access tracks and camp sites. The application area is located approximately 98 kilometres northwest of Tom Price.

The vegetation will be cleared using bulldozers or diggers.

**Vegetation Condition** Pristine: No obvious signs of disturbance (Keighery, 1994);

To:

Excellent: Vegetation structure intact; disturbance affecting individual species, weeds non-aggressive (Keighery, 1994).

**Comment** The vegetation condition was assessed by botanists from ENV Australia (2012, 2013).

Clearing permit CPS 4893/1 was granted by the Department of Mines and Petroleum on 10 May 2012 and allowed for the clearing of 28 hectares of native vegetation. An application to amend this permit was received by DMP on 9 May 2013. The application requests an increase in the area authorised to be cleared and permit boundary.

## 3. Assessment of application against clearing principles

### Comments

Rio Tinto has applied to increase the amount of clearing authorised from 28 hectares to 63 hectares and increase the permit boundary from approximately 410 hectares to 557 hectares. This is to allow for additional drill pads and access tracks associated with an exploration drilling program.

A flora and vegetation survey was undertaken over the additional permit areas (ENV Australia, 2013). The

vegetation and habitat types are consistent with those described in Clearing Permit Decision Report CPS 4893/1.

A targeted threatened flora survey conducted by ENV Australia (2013) did not record any threatened flora species or threatened or priority ecological communities within the expanded application area. Four priority taxa are likely to occur within the application area (ENV Australia, 2013), however only one of these species; *Eremophila magnifica* subsp. *magnifica* (P4), was recorded within the application area (ENV Australia, 2012). This species is well known in the Pilbara region and the proposed clearing is unlikely to significantly impact this species.

Current environmental information has been reviewed (GIS Database) and the assessment of the clearing principles is consistent of the assessment in clearing permit decision report CPS 4893/1.

**Methodology** ENV Australia (2012)  
ENV Australia (2013)  
GIS Database:  
- Threatened and Priority Flora  
- Threatened Fauna  
- Threatened Ecological Sites Buffered  
- Pre-European Vegetation  
- Hydrography, Linear  
- IBRA WA (Regions – Subregions)  
- Rangeland Land System Mapping  
- Public Drinking Water Sources Areas PDWSAs

#### **Planning instrument, Native Title, Previous EPA decision or other matter.**

##### **Comments**

There is one Native Title Claim (WC2011/006) over the area under application (GIS Database). This claim has been registered with the National Native Title Tribunal on behalf of the claimant group. However, the mining tenure has been granted in accordance with the future act regime of the *Native Title Act 1993* and the nature of the act (i.e. the proposed clearing activity) has been provided for in that process, therefore the granting of a clearing permit is not a future act under the *Native Title Act 1993*.

There are three registered Aboriginal Sites of Significance in the vicinity of the application area (Site IDs 7601, 7602, 7603) (GIS Database). It is the proponent's responsibility to comply with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and ensure that no Aboriginal Sites of Significance are damaged through the clearing process.

It is the proponent's responsibility to liaise with the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Department of Water, to determine whether a Works Approval, Water Licence, Bed and Banks Permit, or any other licences or approvals are required for the proposed works.

The clearing permit application was advertised on 20 May 2013 by the Department of Mines and Petroleum inviting submissions from the public. The application was re-advertised on 3 June 2013 correcting the area applied to be cleared. No submissions were received.

**Methodology** GIS Database:  
- Aboriginal Sites of Significance  
- Native Title Claims – Registered with the NNTT

#### **4. References**

- ENV Australia (2012) Munjina Rare Flora Survey. Unpublished Report Prepared by ENV Australia Pty Ltd for Rio Tinto.  
ENV Australia (2013) Munjina Targeted Threatened and Priority Flora Survey. Unpublished Report Prepared by ENV Australia Pty Ltd for Rio Tinto  
Government of Western Australia (2013) 2012 Statewide Vegetation Statistics incorporating the CAR Reserve Analysis (Full Report). WA Department of Environment and Conservation, Perth.  
Keighery, B.J. (1994) Bushland Plant Survey: A Guide to Plant Community Survey for the Community. Wildflower Society of WA (Inc). Nedlands, Western Australia.

#### **5. Glossary**

##### **Acronyms:**

<b>BoM</b>	Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Government
<b>CALM</b>	Department of Conservation and Land Management (now DEC), Western Australia
<b>DAFWA</b>	Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia
<b>DEC</b>	Department of Environment and Conservation, Western Australia
<b>DEH</b>	Department of Environment and Heritage (federal based in Canberra) previously Environment Australia
<b>DEP</b>	Department of Environment Protection (now DEC), Western Australia

<b>DIA</b>	Department of Indigenous Affairs
<b>DLI</b>	Department of Land Information, Western Australia
<b>DMP</b>	Department of Mines and Petroleum, Western Australia
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Environment (now DEC), Western Australia
<b>DoIR</b>	Department of Industry and Resources (now DMP), Western Australia
<b>DOLA</b>	Department of Land Administration, Western Australia
<b>DoW</b>	Department of Water
<b>EP Act</b>	Environmental Protection Act 1986, Western Australia
<b>EPBC Act</b>	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Federal Act)
<b>GIS</b>	Geographical Information System
<b>ha</b>	Hectare (10,000 square metres)
<b>IBRA</b>	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia
<b>IUCN</b>	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources – commonly known as the World Conservation Union
<b>RIWI Act</b>	Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914, Western Australia
<b>s.17</b>	Section 17 of the Environment Protection Act 1986, Western Australia
<b>TEC</b>	Threatened Ecological Community

### Definitions:

{Atkins, K (2005). *Declared rare and priority flora list for Western Australia, 22 February 2005*. Department of Conservation and Land Management, Como, Western Australia} :-

- P1** **Priority One - Poorly Known taxa:** taxa which are known from one or a few (generally <5) populations which are under threat, either due to small population size, or being on lands under immediate threat, e.g. road verges, urban areas, farmland, active mineral leases, etc., or the plants are under threat, e.g. from disease, grazing by feral animals, etc. May include taxa with threatened populations on protected lands. Such taxa are under consideration for declaration as 'rare flora', but are in urgent need of further survey.
- P2** **Priority Two - Poorly Known taxa:** taxa which are known from one or a few (generally <5) populations, at least some of which are not believed to be under immediate threat (i.e. not currently endangered). Such taxa are under consideration for declaration as 'rare flora', but are in urgent need of further survey.
- P3** **Priority Three - Poorly Known taxa:** taxa which are known from several populations, at least some of which are not believed to be under immediate threat (i.e. not currently endangered). Such taxa are under consideration for declaration as 'rare flora', but are in need of further survey.
- P4** **Priority Four – Rare taxa:** taxa which are considered to have been adequately surveyed and which, whilst being rare (in Australia), are not currently threatened by any identifiable factors. These taxa require monitoring every 5–10 years.
- R** **Declared Rare Flora – Extant taxa (= Threatened Flora = Endangered + Vulnerable):** taxa which have been adequately searched for, and are deemed to be in the wild either rare, in danger of extinction, or otherwise in need of special protection, and have been gazetted as such, following approval by the Minister for the Environment, after recommendation by the State's Endangered Flora Consultative Committee.
- X** **Declared Rare Flora - Presumed Extinct taxa:** taxa which have not been collected, or otherwise verified, over the past 50 years despite thorough searching, or of which all known wild populations have been destroyed more recently, and have been gazetted as such, following approval by the Minister for the Environment, after recommendation by the State's Endangered Flora Consultative Committee.

{Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2005} [Wildlife Conservation Act 1950] :-

- Schedule 1** **Schedule 1 – Fauna that is rare or likely to become extinct:** being fauna that is rare or likely to become extinct, are declared to be fauna that is need of special protection.
- Schedule 2** **Schedule 2 – Fauna that is presumed to be extinct:** being fauna that is presumed to be extinct, are declared to be fauna that is need of special protection.
- Schedule 3** **Schedule 3 – Birds protected under an international agreement:** being birds that are subject to an agreement between the governments of Australia and Japan relating to the protection of migratory birds and birds in danger of extinction, are declared to be fauna that is need of special protection.
- Schedule 4** **Schedule 4 – Other specially protected fauna:** being fauna that is declared to be fauna that is in need of special protection, otherwise than for the reasons mentioned in Schedules 1, 2 or 3.

{CALM (2005). *Priority Codes for Fauna*. Department of Conservation and Land Management, Como, Western Australia} :-

- P1** **Priority One: Taxa with few, poorly known populations on threatened lands:** Taxa which are known from few specimens or sight records from one or a few localities on lands not managed for conservation, e.g. agricultural or pastoral lands, urban areas, active mineral leases. The taxon needs urgent survey and evaluation of conservation status before consideration can be given to declaration as threatened fauna.
- P2** **Priority Two: Taxa with few, poorly known populations on conservation lands:** Taxa which are known from few specimens or sight records from one or a few localities on lands not under immediate threat of habitat destruction or degradation, e.g. national parks, conservation parks, nature reserves, State forest, vacant Crown land, water reserves, etc. The taxon needs urgent survey and evaluation of conservation status before consideration can be given to declaration as threatened fauna.

- P3 Priority Three: Taxa with several, poorly known populations, some on conservation lands:** Taxa which are known from few specimens or sight records from several localities, some of which are on lands not under immediate threat of habitat destruction or degradation. The taxon needs urgent survey and evaluation of conservation status before consideration can be given to declaration as threatened fauna.
- P4 Priority Four: Taxa in need of monitoring:** Taxa which are considered to have been adequately surveyed, or for which sufficient knowledge is available, and which are considered not currently threatened or in need of special protection, but could be if present circumstances change. These taxa are usually represented on conservation lands.
- P5 Priority Five: Taxa in need of monitoring:** Taxa which are not considered threatened but are subject to a specific conservation program, the cessation of which would result in the species becoming threatened within five years.

**Categories of threatened species (*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*)**

- EX Extinct:** A native species for which there is no reasonable doubt that the last member of the species has died.
- EX(W) Extinct in the wild:** A native species which:  
 (a) is known only to survive in cultivation, in captivity or as a naturalised population well outside its past range; or  
 (b) has not been recorded in its known and/or expected habitat, at appropriate seasons, anywhere in its past range, despite exhaustive surveys over a time frame appropriate to its life cycle and form.
- CR Critically Endangered:** A native species which is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future, as determined in accordance with the prescribed criteria.
- EN Endangered:** A native species which:  
 (a) is not critically endangered; and  
 (b) is facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future, as determined in accordance with the prescribed criteria.
- VU Vulnerable:** A native species which:  
 (a) is not critically endangered or endangered; and  
 (b) is facing a high risk of extinction in the wild in the medium-term future, as determined in accordance with the prescribed criteria.
- CD Conservation Dependent:** A native species which is the focus of a specific conservation program, the cessation of which would result in the species becoming vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered within a period of 5 years.

**Principles for clearing native vegetation:**

- (a) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises a high level of biological diversity.
- (b) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of, a significant habitat for fauna indigenous to Western Australia.
- (c) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it includes, or is necessary for the continued existence of, rare flora.
- (d) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of a threatened ecological community.
- (e) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is significant as a remnant of native vegetation in an area that has been extensively cleared.
- (f) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is growing in, or in association with, an environment associated with a watercourse or wetland.
- (g) Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause appreciable land degradation.
- (h) Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to have an impact on the environmental values of any adjacent or nearby conservation area.
- (i) Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause deterioration in the quality of surface or underground water.
- (j) Native vegetation should not be cleared if clearing the vegetation is likely to cause, or exacerbate, the incidence or intensity of flooding.