

## **Public Statement: Resignation of the QMM Biodiversity Committee**

The QIT Madagascar Minerals (QMM) Biodiversity Committee was established in 2003, formalizing the relationship between independent outside experts and QMM that had begun in the late 1980s. Over the last 13 years, the Committee has met on more than a dozen occasions, providing a wide range of technical and strategic advice to the Madagascar-based QMM (a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, 20% owned by the Government of Madagascar) and formulating recommendations on each occasion. Over this period, much of the Committee's work was focused on assisting QMM to achieve success as a pilot site for the implementation of Rio Tinto's commitment to have a Net Positive Impact (NPI) on biodiversity at project sites throughout the world. This commitment to NPI was launched at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2008, and later was central to a formal agreement between Rio Tinto and IUCN. The commitment to NPI has had several decidedly positive results for the QMM project, such as the establishment of formally recognized protected areas at three sites with exceptionally rich and important biodiversity (Petriky, Mandena and Ste. Luce), and a decision to support conservation activities at another littoral forest site, Mahabo. However, the recent decision by Rio Tinto to replace its NPI commitment with a vague and fundamentally weakened strategy to "focus on minimizing residual biodiversity impacts", coupled with the failure of QMM and Rio Tinto over several years to commit adequate resources and develop the local capacity required to achieve NPI for critically threatened habitats and species has made it necessary for us, as the current members of the QMM Biodiversity Committee, to resign, effective as of October 20, 2016.

Rio Tinto's reframing of its approach to biodiversity fundamentally compromises its commitment to NPI, which provided an objective, quantitative framework for measuring success. Consequently, Rio Tinto has renounced its globally recognized leadership position by abandoning NPI, and thereby substantially diluting its responsibility if biodiversity obligations are not met. This change in corporate commitment also places full responsibility for determining and implementing appropriate levels of engagement at the level of individual business units such as QMM, shifting the rationale to one based primarily on local legal and regulatory compliance.

Each member of the Biodiversity Committee has over the last 13 years served in an individual capacity and has provided, free of charge, considerable time and effort towards assisting QMM and Rio Tinto in their effort to achieve the goal of NPI, and in particular to ensure that there is no net loss of critical habitat (littoral forest) or extinction of species during the lifetime of the project. The loss of Rio Tinto's corporate commitment to biodiversity, coupled with the fact that mention of the environment is totally absent from the five stated corporate priorities of Rio Tinto, as well as our lack of confidence that adequate long-term resourcing and capacity will be provided for the biodiversity program at QMM, have produced an untenable level of reputational risk for the Committee members to continue being associated with both RT and QMM in our present capacity.

We sincerely hope that QMM will be able to maintain minimum standards for its biodiversity and natural resource management programs, and at the very least to maintain its commitment to the Government of Madagascar to ensure the successful operation of the established protected areas through active and well supported engagement with the local communities in the years ahead.

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