



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL MATERIAL INC.  
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**Press Release**

**MORE ANCIENT ABORIGINAL SITES ARE UNDER THREAT**

9 June - The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material registers its deep concern at the destruction of the Pilbara Caves by Rio Tinto.

On May 24, 2020 while undertaking a mining project, Rio Tinto destroyed the Juukan Gorge rock shelters in the Pilbara region, which have been recognised as a site of extraordinary importance. The AICCM joins others in expressing their concern.

The President of the AICCM, Jennifer O'Connell, said the site contained evidence of continuous occupation for more than 40,000 years.

*"This is of priceless value to the Aboriginal community, but it is also significant on a global scale", she said.*

*"That Juukan Gorge site contained such evidence and intact artefacts was a rare opportunity to understand this continent's cultural history," she said.*

*"Our members are dismayed that Juukan Gorge rock shelters have now been lost".*

The AICCM recognises that Rio Tinto has apologised to the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura people (PKKP) and welcomes the assurance by Rio Tinto's, Chief Executive that they understand the significance of the damage that has occurred and plan to 'overhaul heritage processes' (2 June 2020).

AICCM also recognises that this is one high profile example of destruction of Aboriginal heritage happening on other sites. While the destruction of the Pilbara Caves site is receiving international attention, these actions happen too often with industry almost always taking priority over preserving heritage sites.

The AICCM further supports calls for the strengthening of WA's 1972 Aboriginal Heritage Act which is currently under review. Public submissions can be received later this year, especially section 18, which appears to have inadequate provisions for a review of a decision.

For nearly 50 years the AICCM has been Australia's primary professional association for experts in conservation of cultural heritage.

**For the full statement by the AICCM see here: <https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AICCM-Statement-on-Destruction-of-Pilbara-Caves.pdf>**

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For more information on AICCM's activities: <https://aiccm.org.au/>