

Rio Tinto boss to meet with traditional owners in Pilbara after company blasted ancient rock shelters

Jean-Sebastien Jacques' Western Australia trip comes after mining giant blew up the 46,000-year-old Juukan Gorge shelters



Protesters rally outside the Rio Tinto office in Perth in June after the mining giant blew up the 46,000-year-old Juukan Gorge shelters without informed consent from its Indigenous owners. Photograph: Richard Wainwright/AP

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Rio Tinto's chief executive wants to hold talks with Pilbara Indigenous people after the mining giant's destruction of their ancient rock shelters in Western Australia.

Jean-Sebastien Jacques has completed 14-day mandatory hotel quarantine in Perth and is flying to the state's north, where his company destroyed the 46,000-year-old Juukan Gorge shelters on 24 May.

Rio Tinto has issued a written apology to the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (PKKP) people for blowing up the ancient cultural sites to expand its Brockman 4 iron ore project.

"JS travelled to Perth two weeks ago and after the mandatory period in quarantine he was able to spend time with Rio Tinto colleagues in the Perth office," a Rio spokesman told the Australian Financial Review on Monday.

"He is now headed to the Pilbara, where he will have an opportunity to engage with traditional owners and connect with the Rio Tinto iron ore team."

A Senate committee is currently investigating what led to the destruction of the 46,000-year-old Juukan Gorge rock shelters in the Pilbara region by one of the world's largest mining companies. Committee MPs are expected next month to visit the land of the traditional owners, the PKKP people.

Rio had approval for the blast but subsequent evidence indicated the traditional owners did not provide informed consent.

The company overlooked key information about the cultural significance of the sites and did not inform the PKKP that it had examined other options for expanding its mine which did not involve damaging the rock shelters.

Guardian Australia has contacted the PKKP people for comment.