plan provides a collaborative framework through which Indigenous people can maintain the connection with their country and continue to fulfil their responsibilities as custodians.

Case study 2: Collaborative heritage management

From 2011 to 2013, the South of Embly (SoE) Project Working Group developed the Communities, Heritage and Environment Management Plan (CHEMP) for the area of Rio Tinto Alcan's mining lease between Weipa and Aurukun. The area encompasses the land of the Wik-Waya people, and Rio Tinto proposes to build and operate a new bauxite mine there. The mine will result in a significant change to the physical landscape that poses a number of risks to the traditional owners' ability to fulfil their responsibilities as the cultural custodians of their traditional lands.

The Wik-Waya people maintain a strong sense of cultural identity and spiritual connection to their country. Associated with this is an inherited personal responsibility as traditional owners, especially for elders, 'to look after their country for both their ancestors, whose spirits live 'on country', and for future generations of their families. The elders would like to see the young people in their community take more responsibility for country, so the CHEMP was jointly developed by traditional owners and Rio Tinto to capture the traditional owners' aspirations and outline how the country will be managed in the future.

Despite the changes to country that mining will bring, the traditional owners broadly support the establishment of the mine. Their support has been gained through several years of consultation with the Western Cape Communities Co-Existence Agreement (WCCCA) Coordinating Committee, the formal body representing the interests of the traditional owner groups who are signatories to the WCCCA. The consultation included detailed traditional owner input into the content of the SoE Project EIS.

The CHEMP is a new approach to land management, and is designed to formalise the involvement of Wik-Waya traditional owners in planning and implementing annual land, sea and cultural heritage management activities in the SoE Project area. It also addresses specific requirements arising from the environmental impact statement submitted to the Queensland Government as part of the approvals process. The CHEMP is written from the perspective of traditional owners and Rio Tinto, working as partners in the ongoing management of the project area. While the two groups acknowledge that there are differences between their approaches to land management, they found that they shared common aspirations and goals to minimise the impacts of mining and, where possible, enhance the management of the land. At the same time, the groups recognise that mining will forever change the land from its present natural state.

The CHEMP provides the framework for traditional owners and Rio Tinto to work collaboratively to manage the country over the life of mining in the SoE Project. It works within a relationship based on mutual respect, trust and understanding of common objectives to minimise the environmental and social impacts of mining on the land and the culture of Wik-Waya traditional owners.

We are all getting too old. It's time for the young people to step up and take their responsibility in looking after country. This plan that we have been working on will help that to happen. Those young people need to get back to country. They have a good opportunity to be involved in looking after country as rangers and so forth. We can work with Rio Tinto, and talk about the old ways of doing things and understand some of the new ways as well. I believe if we work closely together then we can look after country properly, and with respect for our ancestors and each other.

Tony Kerindun – Wik-Waya Traditional Owner