

Rinehart refuses to guarantee protection of prehistoric site

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The mining company owned by Australia's richest woman, Gina Rinehart, has failed to respond to urgent calls for the permanent protection of a prehistoric dwelling found on one of its iron ore mines.

A statement released by Hancock Prospecting said Mrs Rinehart would offer a further section of her family's station, Mulga Downs, to house some of the 35,000-year-old indigenous tools discovered recently.

But director Tad Watroba did not respond to questions from *The West Australian* over whether the company would permanently quarantine the rock overhang and surrounding areas on the Hope Downs South mine where the discovery was made.

Joint owner Rio Tinto has already revealed that it would ensure the temporary protection of the area by changing the construction of the mine site, but it refused to guarantee that the area would be protected permanently from mining.

Mr Watroba said Mrs Rinehart had already given some of Mulga Downs to the family of Slim Parker, an elder with the local Martidja Banyjima people, which the family had called Youngaleena.

"Slim Parker, his family and the

Martidja Banyjima people may wish to consider these artefacts being moved to Youngaleena for instance, or somewhere else in the traditional areas," he said.

"Mrs Rinehart would be delighted to offer a further part of Mulga Downs station for the traditional owners to store these historical artefacts adjacent to Youngaleena should this be an alternative solution that would suit the interests of all parties."

Mr Parker said he would consider the offer but would prefer for a cultural centre set up in the Karijini National Park to store a range of Aboriginal artefacts.

The company's failure to offer a guarantee prompted calls from the State Government to investigate how it could ensure the permanent protection of the rock overhang and surrounding areas.

"We call on the people of WA and Australia to say: 'enough is enough . . . We should all call on the WA Government to do something about this'," Mr Parker said.

Minister for Heritage and Indigenous Affairs Michelle Roberts has been unavailable for comment for two days.

A spokesman for Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett indicated that the State had the power to intervene.



Offer: Gina Rinehart