

## Rio coy on speculation of Pilbara copper discovery

MATT CHAMBERS THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM June 25, 2018

Rio Tinto has put its foot on more exploration ground in the sandy North Paterson province in Western Australia's Pilbara region, as satellite photos indicate the miner may have a big copper discovery in the nearby dunes.

A farm-in deal with junior Alloy Resources, announced last week, has seen Rio tie up exploration ground north of Newcrest's Telfer gold and copper mine, adding to previous pegging and farm-in deals in the last couple of years that have seen Rio emerge as the biggest landholder in the North Paterson.

Rio is not the only major eyeing the region. Fortescue Metals wants to diversify beyond iron ore and is also pegging exploration ground in the Paterson.

Rio is by far the biggest tenement holder in the region and the Alloy deal will extend its reach to the south, towards Telfer.

But the more exciting talk of late is that Rio has built an exploration camp in the sand dunes, indicating it has found something worth spending some time on.

As reported in industry newsletter *Resources Rising Stars*, the camp and 10 closely drilled holes on wholly owned Rio ground have been confirmed by satellite updates.

Rio has not confirmed or denied the reports.

The Paterson region itself is prospective, hosting Telfer, the Nifty copper mine, the Woodie Woodie manganese mine and the Kintyre uranium deposit. These are in the southern part of the province, where geological outcropping has shown explorers where minerals might lie beneath the surface.

To the north, the geological features are covered with sand, which has left the province unexplored.

Sipa Resources, under the management of former Newcrest and Newmont geologist Lynda Burnett, was, like Rio, one of a new generation of explorers to enter the area three years ago.

“It’s a new frontier and the (Paterson) belt has a very good discovery track record, so the North Paterson is the logical place to go next,” Mrs Burnett said.

“The North is where the belt goes undercover — we’re excited because we think we have worked out how to explore there.”

Sipa has been experimenting with different geophysics techniques and technology to reinterpret old and new drill data and prioritise new targets.

Rio is silent on what its find or interest in the province is, declining to comment when contacted by *The Australian*.

Sipa’s ground is west of Rio’s and south of Fortescue’s. To the south of Sip, Rio struck a 2016 joint venture with Antipa.

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