

# The West Australian

## Rio Tinto splashes cash to widen copper hunt at Winu

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The West Australian

Monday, 27 April 2020 2:00AM

*Premium*

Rio Tinto has highlighted its commitment to establish a scaleable project around its Winu copper-gold discovery in the East Pilbara by ramping up exploration on a neighbour's ground.

The mining giant had been expected to spend \$2 million this year on the Citadel project, which is part of a joint venture with junior Antipa Minerals.

But the company has lifted its exploration spend to \$9.2m, with a 13,000m drilling campaign and a program of surveying, data processing and drill target generation expected to begin this quarter.

Citadel lies just 5km east of Winu but the focus of Rio's exploration is 45km away at the Calibre deposit, which hosts a resource of 1.3Moz of gold, 69,500t of copper and 730,000t of silver. Rio took a 51 per cent stake in Citadel and assumed operatorship status in January after spending \$11m on the project since the original joint venture agreement was struck in 2015. Under the \$60m staged farm-in, Rio can earn as much as a 75 per cent stake in Citadel.

Despite the increased spending at Citadel, Rio has been forced to postpone until next year further greenfields exploration at the project because of COVID-19.

“The final Citadel 2020 exploration program has been designed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all stakeholders including local indigenous groups, employees and contractors and to also comply with government restrictions aimed at stopping the spread of the COVID-19 virus,” Antipa said.

“These precautions and restrictions have deferred the likely timing of being able to complete heritage surveys and access some proposed drilling areas.”

Antipa said Calibre represented a very large-scale mineral system with mineralisation open in several directions underneath about 80m of more recent sedimentary cover.

Rio is eyeing Calibre as a potential satellite deposit, providing ore feed for its Winu project.

The company said in February it had begun preliminary studies into the development of Winu involving environmental permitting, geotechnical, hydrology, mining, processing and basic engineering design.

Rio has established a substantial exploration camp and associated infrastructure at the remote Winu site, drilling 124,000m last year on the back of 16,000m in 2018. It has said it is targeting first production in 2023, subject to regulatory approvals and consents. Rio plans a staged development of Winu, starting small and scaling the project over time.