



## *Pilbara miners dodge worst of cyclone*

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### **Body**

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Rio Tinto will be playing catch-up with its struggling iron ore operations for the rest of this year but has come through the latest cyclone to hit the WA coast in better shape than first feared.

Iron ore heavyweights Rio, BHP and **Fortescue** and other big miners are counting the cost of Cyclone Zelia but appear to have escaped major damage over the weekend. However, many roads remain closed and remote communities and cattle stations have been hard hit by flooding.

Rio was able to get iron ore carriers back into the ports of Cape Lambert and Dampier late on Saturday and there are no indications of damage to its 2000km-long rail network.

However, the latest disruption means Rio's port operations have been out of action for almost two weeks since late January.

Rio shipped 328.6 million -tonnes of iron ore from its Pilbara ports in 2024, in line with production guidance, which remains unchanged for 2025 despite its recent setbacks.

Cyclone Zelia crossed the Pilbara coast northeast of Port Hedland on Friday and weakened into a tropical low that dumped heavy rain on the minerals-rich but sparsely populated Pilbara region.

The cyclone's eventual path took it away from a direct hit on Port Hedland or Rio's ports, and also spared the LNG industry from major damage.

BHP said its mines, rail and infrastructure at Port Hedland had fared better than expected as it hunkered down for Cyclone Zelia.

"The experience of our teams in managing cyclones in the Pilbara meant we were well prepared," a spokesperson said. "Our teams are now progressively returning to site, with recovery and ramp-up operations underway." **Fortescue** said all non-essential travel to its mines remained suspended and that all its workers on the ground were safe.

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"While some of our operations have experienced temporary disruptions, we are working to resume normal activities as quickly and safely as possible," a **Fortescue** spokesperson said.

BHP is due to hand down its first half results on Tuesday, followed by Rio's full-year results on Wednesday and **Fortescue's** first- half numbers on Thursday.

Lithium miner Pilbara Minerals, which reports first-half results on Thursday, appears to have dodged a bullet after early modelling showed Cyclone Zelia tracking straight at its Pilgangoora mine. "Initial assessments indicate no material damage to our operation, and our on-site team continue to conduct infrastructure checks," a spokesman said.

Pilbara Minerals has offered support to surrounding communities, including Strelley and Warralong, caught up in flooding and other fallout from the cyclone.

Mineral Resources shut down operations at its Wodgina lithium mine and flew non-essential staff to Perth in advance of the cyclone.

It said initial assessments indicated minimal impact at Wodgina with workers returning to site.

Cyclone Zelia hit the Pilbara with Rio still carrying out repair work in the wake of Cyclone Sean, which flooded key parts of its operations in January and also hit BHP, **Fortescue** and MinRes.

Even before the latest storm, Rio admitted first-quarter shipments would be affected by the impact of Cyclone Sean, and subsequent closures from Cyclone Taliah and Cyclone Vince.

The most northern of Rio's 17 mines in the Pilbara, including Gudai-Darri, appear to have copped the brunt of the latest downpour and may still have water sitting in the bottom of pits.

The mines would normally be better prepared to cope with cyclone disruption but they were soaked by heavy rainfall in the December quarter, forcing Rio to draw down on stockpiles. Rio's export terminal at East Intercourse Island remains out of action after flooding caused by Cyclone Sean, which dumped a record 274mm of rain on parts of the Pilbara in a 24-hour period. The operations are scheduled to come back online this week.

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