

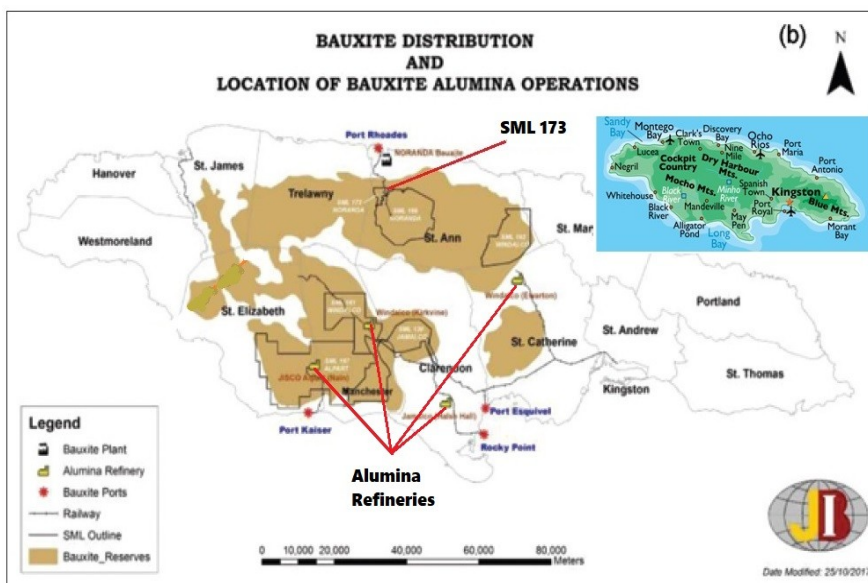
# Problems with the Bauxite-Alumina Industry in Jamaica

Bauxite or ‘red dirt’, the raw material used in the production of aluminium, has been extracted in Jamaica by open-cast mining since 1952. In the 1960s Jamaica was the leading producer in the world and the industry expanded over the years to include four large refineries which process most of the raw bauxite into alumina before it is exported.



Although the bauxite/alumina industry has produced foreign exchange earnings and a number of jobs, it has always been an environmental disaster, removing forest cover, disturbing and polluting waterways, displacing residents, destroying agricultural livelihoods, compromising air and water quality and thus damaging the health and well-being of thousands of Jamaicans. Large areas of good farmland have been torn up, replaced after mining with a thin layer of top-soil that is barely fertile. Whole communities have been displaced, or compromised, with very limited or no compensation. In Gibraltar, St. Ann, mining has taken place right up to the

boundary of the local school. And the alumina refineries which use copious amounts of caustic soda, discharged after processing into vast ‘red mud lakes, further pollute both the air and soil, toxic heavy metals included.



With steep declines in earnings from the industry since the 1970s, growing numbers of people in Ja-





ment (EIA). The 2017 CCPA was been formally gazetted at about the same time. The released area is 1,333 hectares with a duration of five years although at the public consultation the CEO of the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) made it clear that subsequent applications for mining in SML 173 would be considered. This ‘released area’ is within the CCSG Cockpit Country boundaries and is in the upper watershed of the Rio Bueno.

There is a clear conflict of interest since the Jamaican government, home of the environmental regulator (the NRCA), also has a 51% stake in Noranda Jamaica. In addition the Prime Minister has a veto power over NRCA decisions, exercised recently regarding a controversial limestone quarrying application also in the parish of St. Ann. UK-based Concord Resources plc holds the remaining 49% of Noranda Jamaica and is also the managing agent.

In addition to the problems involved in the bauxite mining, another set of problems exist around the four plants in Jamaica that process the bauxite into alumina. The plants use caustic soda some of which escapes into the air which, along with the dust from the



extensive, one mile long red-mud lakes, compromises both the health and living conditions of local residents. The lakes which hold the tailings from the caustic process also contain heavy metals. When there is heavy rain, the lakes sometimes overflow into nearby rivers which are the source of drinking water and peoples’ livelihoods.

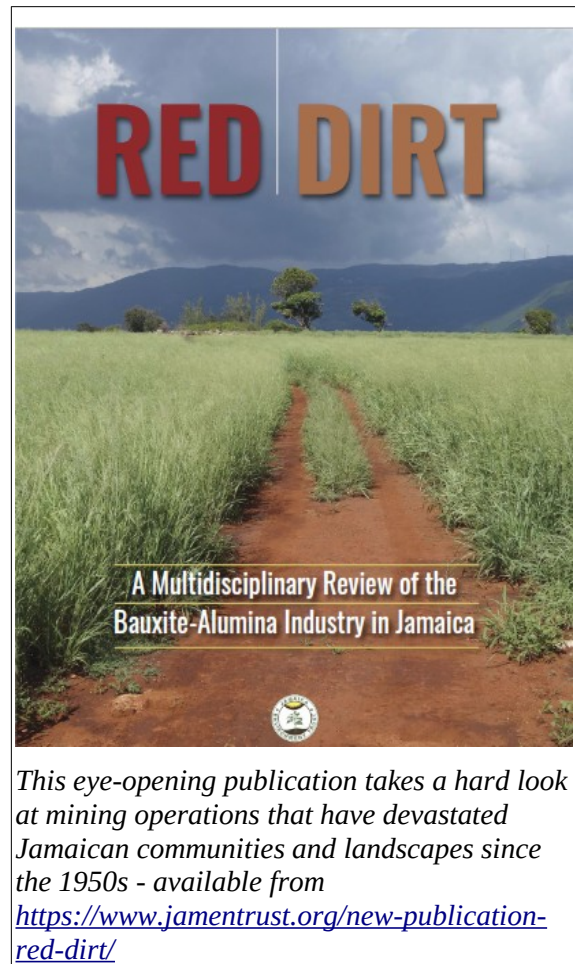
The latest such spill, with four in the previous four years, was in July 2022 at the UC-Rusal plant in Ewarton, St. Catherine resulting in dead fish, lost incomes and water cut-offs for residents in both Spanish Town and west Kingston which lasted for several days. The penalties are too weak to force better compliance such that corrective work at the plant, mandated in 2019, is still not complete ... and yet the license is not withdrawn.

There are thus both short and long-term problems with the bauxite-alumina industry in Jamaica which need to be addressed, serious enough to question whether the destructive open-cast mining and the refining of bauxite should be continued, or not. JET's Red Dirt Study (2020) found that the bauxite-alumina industry has contributed approximately US\$1 billion each year to Jamaica's GDP against social costs of between US\$2.9 billion to US\$13 billion.

We are calling for a commitment to support the following demands by activists in Jamaica:

1. The re-designation of the Cockpit Country Protected Area using the boundaries defined by the Cockpit Country Stakeholders Group. This would include all the area of SML 173 and a buffer zone.
2. No mining of any sort (bauxite, limestone etc) in the Cockpit Country, including the buffer zone, as defined by the Cockpit Country Stakeholders Group
3. No further bauxite mining permits to be issued anywhere in Jamaica
4. The urgent development of an exit plan for the bauxite/alumina industry in Jamaica, including options for economic replacement and reparations for the communities that have been sacrificed to the industry.
5. In the meantime stricter monitoring and a review of the practices of the bauxite/alumina industry to reduce the environmental and social damage to an absolute minimum.

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*This eye-opening publication takes a hard look at mining operations that have devastated Jamaican communities and landscapes since the 1950s - available from <https://www.jamentrust.org/new-publication-red-dirt/>*