

Rio Tinto has said it plans to start production in 2023, assuming that feasibility studies confirm Jadar's viability and all necessary approvals are obtained.

Speaking on local TV, Serbia's President, Aleksandar Vucic said the government fully supports the project, which could become Serbia's second largest export earner once developed. He also said his administration won't let it happen if it doesn't get the people's approval first. Vucic, may seek voter approval for Rio Tinto's Jadar lithium project near the city of Loznica, in western Serbia, as community opposition grows.

Jadar has been facing local opposition due to heritage issues. Its footprint covers the area around Paulje, a Bronze Age archaeological site, as well as several classified natural monuments.

"This part of Jadar and Radjevina has been inhabited for more than 8,000 years and no one will drive us away," activist Marija Alimpić told local media. "We give our vote to nature and there is no referendum, nor profit that is above nature," she said.

Community group Ne Damo Jadar, which comprises 350 local property owners, says the planned underground lithium mine would force people out of the area and carries potential impacts to forests and water. Ne Damo Jadar says Rio's proposal covers 22 villages and mining is to occur under two riverbeds, both of which are prone to flooding.

"We own land with archaeological remains dating back to the Bronze Age and the area also contains classified natural monuments," Ne Damo Jadar member Marijana Petkovic, said last month at a rally in front of Rio Tinto's offices in Serbia.

"How can Rio Tinto's CEO be serious about making protecting cultural heritage a centre-issue, when at the same time in Serbia the company wants to develop a mine that will swallow-up natural monuments and heritage dating back to the 14th century BC?" Petkovic said.

Coordinated protests against the proposed mine were held in April in London, at the time of Rio's annual general meeting, as well as at the miner's offices in Belgrade and Washington DC.

Jadar, discovered by Rio Tinto geologists in 2004, is one of the largest greenfield lithium projects currently in development. It has the potential to produce about 55,000 tonnes of battery grade lithium carbonate. In 2020, Rio approved an almost \$200 million investment to complete the final phase of a feasibility study that is expected to be finalized this year, with a final decision to follow. Both products expected from the project - lithium and borates - play important roles in a more energy-efficient future. The first is widely regarded as "key" ingredient in the making of the batteries that power electric vehicles (EVs) and high tech devices. Borates, in turn, are used in insulation in fibreglass and wind turbines.

Sourcing Europe

Jadar mine would supply mainly the European market, one of the world's largest growing EV markets. In only three years, British car makers will have to source local electric car batteries as set by the Brexit free trade deal inked in 2020. Under the agreement, all European trade in cars and parts will continue to be free of tariffs or quotas after the Brexit transition period ended on December 31, as long as they contain enough content from either UK or EU factories. Batteries will at first be allowed to have up to 70% of materials from countries outside the EU. From 2024 onwards, that requirement will tighten to 50%. The EU is currently constructing large-scale battery cell factories. European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic has said that by 2025, the planned facilities would produce cells to power at least six million electric vehicles. In September 2019, the UK government launched the Faraday Battery Challenge as part of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF), to spur research and innovation. Li4UK (Securing a Domestic Lithium Supply Chain for the UK) was one of the projects to secure financial backing from the pioneering program, soon to open a fifth round.

Source: [mining.com](https://www.mining.com)