

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Votes and Proceedings

Hansard

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2007-2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 24 May, on motion by Mr Costello:

Monday, 28 May

Dr LAWRENCE (Fremantle) (4.44 pm)

(in part, stated)

I want to turn briefly now to another area which is often overlooked by this government—that is, the question of protection of heritage in Australia.

There is a very important site on the coast of Western Australia which I have spoken about before in this parliament, the Burrup, the Dampier Archipelago.

At least two areas have been nominated for inclusion on the National Heritage List.

It is a fascinating area and without precedent both in terms of its prehistory and in terms of its significance for Indigenous people.

It is of world significance, as indicated by the fact that globally now there is a campaign called Stand Up For the Burrup.

People outside Australia appear to know more about the Burrup than Australians do, and certainly they seem to care more than this government appears to care, as indicated by people standing up outside world monuments to indicate their support to protect this very important site.

They have demonstrated their support in Seville in Spain, outside the Opera House, outside Carnegie Hall, outside the university campus festival in Grenoble, in Amsterdam, in Lyons, in Brussels, in Cape Town, and so on.

Yet this government still cannot move itself to list this very important site.

Indeed, the minister refused a request for emergency listing and has continued to delay the decision to list.

More damage, unfortunately, is done to the site every day.

There are alternatives, as many people have pointed out, particularly at Onslow.

We do not have to further damage this very important site.

The reason I wanted to mention it again today is that I have had the good fortune to get access to a further report to the minister and to the department from one of the consultants, Jo McDonald Cultural Heritage Management.

I hasten to add that the report did not come from her.

It has not yet been publicised, but it certainly should be because it reinforces the strong advice that has already been given to the government that the archipelago in its entirety is of extremely high significance.

Amongst other things, the report says that 'no one area of the archipelago can necessarily be considered to be representative of the whole'.

Successive governments, state and federal, have tried to carve out bits, saying that there is a whole lot more left, but the point about this site is that 'no one area is representative.

It is highly varied and it is cumulative'.

The other point that I think is worth making, and that is made in this report, is that only a portion of the archipelago has been intensively surveyed.

We are destroying this without knowing what we are doing.

The report also points out that industrial development has affected approximately 14 per cent of the entire landmass so far.

This research report undertook some very extensive additional work which had never before been done.

Part of the problem here, as I have indicated, is that too little of this site has been properly surveyed.

I want to read into *Hansard* some of the conclusions of that extended research program and the use of existing data.

The report looks at each of the National Heritage List criteria and presents the data that support them.

For instance, one of the criteria is that the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of its importance in the course or pattern of Australia's natural or cultural history.

The conclusion here is that the archaeology of the Damper Archipelago provides an outstanding and arguably unique example of long-term Aboriginal occupation of an arid littoral landscape for Northern Australia and that the art provides unique evidence of Aboriginal occupation and persistence within a desert landscape, including the transition to a maritime landscape.

On the second criterion, that the place has outstanding heritage value because of its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history, I think it is very important to recognise the conclusions here.

The report states:

The cultural heritage values of the place are endangered.

... It is estimated that there are well over one million engraved motifs on the Dampier Archipelago.

They are without peer.

If you have not been there, you should.

The report continues:

A significant number of valleys and foreshore pavement complexes contain many tens of thousands of individually executed motifs.

There is a significant superimpositioning of motifs.

The density of stone arrangements is also at the highest end recorded within Australia for such site types—
That is well in advance of anywhere else.

It goes on to say:

...the area has operated as an aggregation locale for groups from widely dispersed areas over a long time period.

We are talking tens of thousands of years here being destroyed, apparently without regret.

The report goes on to say:

The current footprint of industry on the Burrup Peninsula, and its anticipated spread, present both direct and indirect impacts which place cultural heritage—and the art of the Archipelago—at high-risk of being endangered.

The government needs to know that when it moves to list this site, as it now must, and it should not delay longer.

There are other criteria which the data clearly indicate that this site meets.

For instance, the spectacular rock art of the archipelago is said to be as well known at the local, regional, national and international levels.

Rock art specialists have either visited or worked on the archipelago and they have been unanimous in declaring it is one of the most aesthetically spectacularly and information rich art provinces they have ever witnessed—and yet we are busily chopping it up.

The researchers were also asked to comment on the value of the place in its creative and technical achievement over a particular period of time and again these are exceptional recommendations.

The report says:

The rock art of the Dampier Archipelago demonstrates extremely high diversity in theme, style, mode of execution, dynamism, level of naturalism and abstraction and depiction of recognisable economic and social behaviours.

The language is perhaps a little off-putting, but the important thing here is that this is a site without peer.

This deserves World Heritage listing, do not worry about National Heritage listing.

I would say, frankly, that it perhaps deserves priority over the Flemington race course, which has already been listed.