

<http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/heritage/Burrup/BurrupPeninsula.aspx>

The Dampier Archipelago: A place of National Heritage

The Dampier Archipelago, which includes the Burrup Peninsula, is located in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, some 1,550 kilometres from the capital city of Perth. On the 3 July 2007 the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, the Honourable Malcolm Turnbull, made an announcement that the Archipelago has now been included in Australia's National Heritage List for its outstanding Aboriginal heritage values. To read the Federal Minister's media release please [click here](#)



What area does National Heritage Listing cover?

The listing covers approximately 370 square kilometres of the Dampier Archipelago, the Burrup Peninsula and the adjacent mainland of the Western Australian Pilbara coast.

Why is the area so special?

The area has a remarkable range and diversity of Aboriginal heritage sites, including quarries, middens, fish traps, rock shelters, ceremonial sites, artefact scatters, grinding patches, stone arrangements and rock art engravings. The Archipelago is world renowned for its spectacular ancient rock art engravings, which are probably the most well-known feature of the area. However, there are many other significant sites in the region, particularly standing stones and stone arrangements, which are equally significant.

The area is arguably the largest concentration of rock art engravings in the world. The Dampier Archipelago has been placed on the National Heritage List in recognition of its high concentration of extraordinary and highly significant rock art engravings, in addition to its considerable standing stones, complex stone arrangements, fish traps stone pits and hunting hides.

Not only are these sites of tremendous national and international significance, they are of profound cultural significance to the local Aboriginal people. The area is a special place to Aboriginal people and has been their home for tens of



thousands of years.

The area has an enormous variety of engravings. Many different depictions and motifs feature across the Archipelago and in the Burrup Peninsula in particular. Engravings include depictions of human figures, archaic faces and animals, including thylacines or Tasmanian Tigers, which are now extinct, and kangaroos, whales, fish, emus and turtles. Some of the engravings are more than 10,000 years old. In the Burrup Peninsula alone it is estimated there are more than a 100,000 rock art engravings. Across the Archipelago it is estimated that the number of engravings number in the millions.

An unrivalled record of human occupation

The Dampier Archipelago is not only significant because of the sheer number and diversity of heritage sites. It is also enormously valuable as these sites provide an unrivalled record of human occupation and adaptation for at least the past 20,000 years. Many of the depictions found in the region illustrate human figures engaged in activities and rituals. Major environmental changes during the last 20,000 years demanded the Indigenous population to adapt their lifestyles to accommodate change and survive. As such, the Archipelago is evidence of the adaptation and history of the oldest living culture in the world, the Indigenous people of Australia.



Art across the ages

The wide variety of styles of artistic depiction across the Dampier Archipelago provides an exceptional insight into the way Indigenous societies and cultures have evolved and changed over time in adaptation to an ever-changing landscape.

A number of the images found across the Archipelago can also be traced to other places across the Pilbara, demonstrating connections between people and their traditions over tremendous distances. Perhaps most notably, the archaic faces found in the Archipelago are also found in the Western Desert, demonstrating a profound connection between inland and coastal people, their traditions and trade.

Not only do the rock art engravings offer a unique and profound insight into the oldest living culture in the world, the engravings also reveal valuable information about the changing flora and fauna of the region over thousands of years. Some of the animals depicted have become extinct, and other animals appear to be ancestors of present day Australian animals including various marsupials and birds.

What are we doing to protect the area?

A National Heritage Listing means that the unique heritage sites and values of the area will be protected and preserved for present and future generations alike.

The State of Western Australia and the Commonwealth Government are working closely together to manage the area. The Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments are currently developing a bilateral agreement and accredited management arrangement that protects the important heritage values and provides a process for the State to manage major projects approvals. The capacity to develop this kind of management arrangement is a feature of the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, under which the area has been assessed and subsequently included on the National Heritage list.

Places on the National Heritage list are protected by Federal Government powers, which provide significant protection for the area's unique heritage values. This Federal Government protection provides an additional layer of protection to that already provided under Western Australian law. The State's own heritage legislation, including the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972, will continue to apply.

Current initiatives

While the State is working to develop the management arrangement with the Commonwealth, the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) continues to work closely with other State Government agencies and bodies, including Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and Department of Industry and Resources (DoIR), to develop initiatives to protect the outstanding national heritage values of the area. The State will also continue to consult directly with Indigenous communities to develop culturally appropriate initiatives in line with the community's wishes.



Current initiatives include:

- The appointment of Honorary Wardens to monitor the heritage values of the area and to be 'eyes and ears' on the ground. This programme is running in conjunction with the DIA and DEC;
- DIA is offering heritage training for all major agencies in the region to increase knowledge and understanding of Indigenous heritage, with particular reference to National Heritage listing;
- DIA is in the process of developing a comprehensive Indigenous Heritage Management Plan to provide a framework for the ongoing management of the heritage values of the entire Dampier Archipelago;
- DoIR in conjunction with DIA are conducting heritage surveys over future industrial land with the region's Indigenous groups to identify significant heritage sites that may require special protection. There are also plans to conduct further studies over the remainder of the Burrup Peninsula and Archipelago;
- The Burrup Rock Art Monitoring Committee is continuing to monitor industry emissions and their impact on rock art. The Committee is an independent body and the monitoring work is being carried out by CSIRO. The results so far have shown that there is no impact from emissions on the area's rock art engravings.

Other initiatives

The region's Indigenous communities and the State Government signed an agreement, the Burrup and Maitland Industrial Estates Agreement, in January 2003. The Burrup Agreement allows for industrial development to progress across southern parts of the Burrup Peninsula, while at the same time establishing a conservation estate and ensuring Aboriginal heritage is protected. Under the agreement the State will transfer 4,900 hectares of the Burrup to the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation. This area will be managed as a conservation reserve by the Department of Environment and Conservation in conjunction with a Park Council.

Future directions

DIA will continue to work closely with the community, other government agencies and industry groups to protect and preserve the outstanding heritage values of the Dampier Archipelago.