

House: Legislative Council- QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Date: Wednesday, 10 September 2003
Member: Chapple, Hon Robin; Travers, Hon Ken
Subject: ROCK ART, BURRUP PENINSULA
Page: 10931b - 10932a / 1

ROCK ART, BURRUP PENINSULA

992. Hon Robin Chapple to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for State Development

In relation to rock art on the Burrup Peninsular -

(1) With the destruction and or removal of petroglyphs on the Burrup is there any evaluation of which types of engraving have a high likelihood of being amongst the earliest evidence in the world for human symbolism?

(2) In relation to (1), is there any evaluation of whether these should in fact be removed and or how they are to be protected for all time?

(3) Is there any evaluation of the international ethnographic value of the older petroglyphs?

(4) Is the rock art monitoring committee going to find a replacement for Dr Vinnicombe's skills base on the committee?

(5) If yes to (4), when will that position on the committee be filled and by whom?

(6) If no to (4), why not?

(7) Who will be making decisions on which art work will be monitored and on what justification?

(8) Why was field microscopy of the deteriorating ferromanganous accretionary deposits not included as a study in the tenders that have been called for research into the effect of industrial emissions on ancient Aboriginal rock carvings on the Burrup Peninsula?

Hon KEN TRAVERS replied:

I am advised:

(1) Researchers believe that engraved motifs featuring terrestrial animals and geometric designs, particularly those that are heavily repatinated and feature the darker 'desert varnish' coatings, are among the earliest expressions of human symbolism.

The earliest evidence of human symbolism is an important topic that should be conducted in a research framework, such as a postgraduate study, and not driven or influenced by the imperatives of site recording or salvage.

Recording is the first step in the research act. Salvage represents a last resort measure to prevent destruction.

In situ or salvaged material is then available to answer such questions as that posed about human symbolism.

(2) The Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee evaluates the significance of Aboriginal sites recorded during heritage surveys under sections 5 and 39(2) of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. This deliberative process is assisted by the significance assessments of traditional custodians, archaeologists and anthropologists conducting the fieldwork.

(3) Many researchers have published papers in international journals on the evolution of rock art styles.

(4) Yes.

(5) A number of names have been suggested to the Committee. Their skills and experience are being assessed by the Committee before a recommendation is made to the Minister for State Development.

(6) Not applicable.

(7) The Rock Art Monitoring Committee will decide on the art work to be monitored. Possible monitoring sites are being selected based on predictions of industrial emissions, exposure to marine influence and cultural issues associated with the art.

(8) It is intended that the Geological Survey Division of the Department of Industry and Resources will conduct studies of rock surfaces adjacent to and distant from industrial activity.