

19 March 2007

Colloquium on *The Future of Heritage*
Ename Center for Public Archaeology and Heritage Presentation
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BELGIUM

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To Whom It May Concern

We, the undersigned members of the Federal Parliament of Australia, understand the Ename Center is holding a Colloquium on The Future of Heritage.

We would appreciate the opportunity to draw the Colloquium's attention to the issue of ancient Aboriginal heritage in the Dampier Archipelago, Western Australia, and ask the Colloquium notes the following:

The Dampier Archipelago has been described as containing the largest concentration of rock art in the world, estimated at up to one million petroglyphs, with a diversity of images said to be unmatched in the world. Associated with the art is a rich archaeological record including camp sites, quarries, shell middens and standing stone arrangements.

The entire area, known as the Dampier Rock Art Precinct, records up to 30,000 years of continuous use and occupation by Aboriginal people, and has been recognised as a single cultural landscape that is highly significant by international standards. The area continues to be a sacred place for the local traditional custodians of the land.

Despite this, the Australian Government and Western Australian Government still allow industrial development in the Rock Art Precinct to continue. This has resulted in the physical removal and destruction of hundreds of cultural features and thousands of individual petroglyphs.

State and Federal processes and legislation have sanctioned this. Close working relationships between large industrial developers, government and individual politicians present major conflicts of interest in heritage protection.

Nomination of the Dampier Rock Art Precinct to Australia's National Heritage List was made in 2004, with the government's own Heritage Council unequivocally advising the Precinct should be listed. However some three years after nomination, the Minister continues to defer making a decision.

In December 2006 the authors of this letter made application for emergency listing of the Precinct to the National Heritage List. This was in response to imminent removal and destruction of petroglyphs with the development of Woodside Energy's Pluto gas processing plant on the Burrup Peninsula.

That application was strenuously opposed by industry and by the Western Australian government, and the application was refused by the federal Minister. Removal of petroglyphs and destruction of the site is now occurring..

The Dampier Rock Art Precinct has remained on the World Monuments Fund's list of 100 Most Threatened Monuments in the world since 2003. The Precinct is listed as one of the ten most threatened sacred sites in the world by the International Sacred Sites Trust. The traditional Aboriginal custodians of the area oppose and condemn any further development of the Burrup Peninsula, and nearly 25,000 Australians have signed a petition calling for protection of the area.

We request that the Colloquium support calls to the Western Australian and Federal Governments for: a halt to the current destruction and removal of artefacts at the Burrup Peninsula; the addition of the nominated area to the National Heritage List as soon as possible; the commissioning of publicly available and peer-reviewed research of the area; and for management of the whole Dampier Rock Art Precinct which involves the traditional custodians of the land..

Yours sincerely



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