



The Australian Institute
for the Conservation of
Cultural Material

GPO Box 1638
Canberra, ACT 2601

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Dear [Minister for XXX],

In April 2015 the government of Western Australia removed ancient rock art sites on the Burrup Peninsula from the state's heritage register.

As Australia's professional organization for heritage conservation professionals, the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials is concerned that removal of these sites from the register puts them at risk of damage or destruction through industrial development.

Our members work to preserve Australia's heritage for current and for future generations. The value of this site to us all warrants its long-term preservation, promotion and protection.

Burrup features the largest concentration of ancient rock art in the world. It is estimated the area contains up to a million carvings of figures, faces and animals. Burrup is also home to some of the world's oldest art, with some petroglyphs thought to be up to 30,000 years old.

That these sites have deep cultural significance for local Aboriginal people is obvious. However, as part of the history of this continent, they have value to all Australians—cultural, historical and scientific. (Some works depict animals that are no longer found in the region, including the Tasmanian tiger, which makes them a scientific resource as well as a cultural site). In fact, these paintings are part of the shared history of civilisation, in the same way that we in Australia value ancient sites in Europe and the Middle East. They warrant long-term preservation, rather than sacrifice to short-term interests.

Other countries go to great lengths to protect and promote equivalent heritage. The 17,000-year-old Lascaux cave paintings in France are a UNESCO World Heritage site. The petroglyphs at Burrup predate the Egyptian pyramids, the ancient city of Petra, and the circle at Stonehenge by thousands of years.

At a time when so much of the world's heritage is at risk due to war, civil unrest and natural disasters, it would be unconscionable if we were to lose these sites now, after all this time, just to placate local commercial interests. In 2003 the World Monuments Fund added Burrup to its list of Most Endangered Places—evidence that, despite the many distractions, the world is watching us.

We ask you to please protect the ancient rock art on Burrup Peninsula from industrial development, by ensuring protection at state and federal levels. At the very least the Burrup sites should be re-registered on local heritage lists to ensure their heritage value is observed. Ideally, we would like to see the entire Dampier Archipelago promoted to World Heritage status.

Few of us live lives that leave much of an imprint; as [Minister for XXX] you have more opportunity than most to change the future. Imagine if our actions today could help push these ancient sites another 30,000 years into the future. Don't let the loss of these icons be your enduring legacy.

Sincerely,

MaryJo Lelyveld
National President, AICCM

Background reading:

Article in New Matilda: <https://newmatilda.com/2015/04/30/wa-government-deregisters-worlds-oldest-rock-art-collection-sacred-site>

Information from Friends of Australian Rock Art:

<http://www.fara.com.au/aboriginal-heritage-protection-disgrace>

<http://www.burup.org.au/>

<http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/news/2013/04/burup-peninsula-rock-art-among-worlds-oldest/>