



# Friends of Australian Rock Art Inc. (FARA)

## Convenors' Report

21 March 2020

We are pleased to present this report of FARA's activities since the 2019 AGM held on 13 April last year. We wish to thank the Committee and all members who contributed this year to the organisation's ongoing effort to protect the rock art of Murujuga/ the Burrup peninsula/ part of the Dampier Archipelago.

### 1. Key issues

#### 1.1. North West Shelf / Browse Expansion

For most of the last year we have been occupied with submissions to the EPA and DWER seeking to have them either thwart, or at least place stricter controls on Woodside's gargantuan plans to bring even more gas ashore from the Browse Basin off the Kimberley coast to the North West Shelf Joint Ventures plant in Karratha, which they manage. (Of course, they also have plans to bring further gas ashore from the Scarborough field to their own Pluto LNG plant – but for the moment, the Browse/Burrup Hub project has our urgent attention.)

It will be the largest and dirtiest LNG operation in the country, with >4 times the emissions of the proposed Adani coal mine and equivalent to annual emissions from 35 coal-fired power stations.

Not only will its projected carbon emissions of 6 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> (over the life of the project) make an unprecedented contribution to climate change, destroying Australia's chance of ever reaching the global goal of net zero emissions by 2050, but its enormous increase in acidic emissions will also accelerate the deterioration and subsequent destruction of the precious petroglyphs of Murujuga we are so anxious to preserve for posterity.

We would like to sincerely thank our members and supporters for the valuable individual contributions they have repeatedly made at our request – these have strengthened and enhanced FARA's submissions.

Right now the ball is in the court of Tom Hatton and the EPA – may he have the courage and foresight to make the strongest recommendations possible to an unwilling and resource-greedy WA Government. Strong recommendations might open up possibilities for future litigation by our concerned community and activist groups. And 'might' is the operative word here because unfortunately our WA EPA, unlike other EPAs around the country, is the only one that has no legislative power... surprise! (which reduces our chances of an outcome like the Rocky Hill decision in NSW)

We have also recently written to the Federal Minister for the Environment, Sussan Ley, asking if there is anything she can do to help the situation, given that some of Woodside's proposed operation falls in Commonwealth waters administered by the EPBC Act.

Again unfortunately, this Act has very weak controls regarding harmful emissions, but it is shortly due for its 10 yearly review – so watch this space for more submission requests! Wouldn't it be great if she were the first Environment Minister since Malcolm Turnbull to do something concrete to save Murujuga's rock art?

## **1.2 Research into the impact of emissions, and management**

The Murujuga Rock Art Conservation research project set up at UWA by John Black in collaboration with CRAR+M, as represented by Ben Smith, Professor of World Rock Art, is progressing well. They have done multiple tests applying different concentrations of pollutants to the patina of the rock art to study its rate of dissolution. Those of you who kindly contributed to our initial crowdfunding appeal will have received an update on their work – and all that's wanting now is more rocks to analyse, which John Black is hoping to obtain on his next trip to the Burrup.

John plans to attend the next meeting of the Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group, set up by the WA government's DWER in August 2018. (While it is scheduled for May, the COVID-19 situation unfortunately means that this meeting will likely be postponed or held virtually, so that he would be unable to collect more samples.)

Unfortunately JB and Jo MacDonald of CRAR+M are the only designated members with scientific/rock art expertise (all others are government and industry representatives) – and yet when the tender for air monitoring was recently awarded (after a year of waiting), neither of them had been consulted! The tender was awarded to a newly formed eastern states company without obvious experience in analytical science, and we are anxiously waiting to hear details of their intended work program.

Regarding the effect of toxic emissions on the health of the local Burrup/Dampier/Karratha population, we informed you last year that the report we received from the University of Adelaide's Exposure Science and Health Department in Feb 2018 stated that there was a serious threat to the health of the people in the vicinity of YARA Pilbara's ammonium nitrate plant from nitrogen dioxide emissions.

This report was refuted by Yara Pilbara and DWER on the grounds that the toxic plume recorded was a one-off occurrence and not supported by further evidence. The WA branch of Doctors for the Environment were reluctant to get directly involved in spite of rumours of the 'Karratha syndrome'.

We now have another significant public health report commissioned by CCWA from Dr Sajni Gupta, entitled *Living with Uncertainty: every breath you take in the Burrup Peninsula*. Once vital data from this report is submitted for peer review and published in a scientific journal, we are in a much stronger position to argue that there are adverse health implications of toxic industrial emissions! And more good news is that Doctors for the Environment are now also expressing their concerns to the WA Department of Health.

## **1.3 World Heritage listing**

Hallejulah! – Murujuga was accepted last week to UNESCO's Tentative World Heritage list! – after all those years of striving by Robin Chapple, Robert Bednarik and countless others! But we're still unconvinced that the official application for WHL cannot be submitted until 2022...

Our real concern is that this will give the WA government time to approve Woodside's mega-expansion plans, as well as proposals by Perdaman Fertilisers and Coogee Chemicals (for which you helped us ask the EPA for Public Environmental Reviews), and others? On a positive note, we are

delighted to see that Wesfarmers has decided not to join Coogee Chemicals and Mitsubishi after all – well done Wesfarmers, you good corporate citizen!

Further industrial development could seriously compromise WHL for Murujuga – and those most devastated would be the Aboriginal custodians of Murujuga, represented by MAC. Not only would they stand to lose vital protection for their ancient cultural heritage, but also relevant jobs and a healthy income from tourism. Again, unfortunately, their hands are tied by the 2003 BMIEA which decreed that, in return for ongoing funding from government and industry, they forfeited their land rights and so had no facility to object to further industrial expansion on the Burrup.

## 2. Advocacy

In addition to pursuing the key issues above, FARA has maintained its advocacy activities through ongoing communication with both state and federal parliamentarians, government officials and industry, CCWA and MAC, and various other lobby groups.

After deafening silence from Josh Frydenberg, Melissa Price, and even Tony Burke, we decided to focus on the more dynamic action happening at home, and particularly on the CCWA front.

On 30 March, FARA and John Black (JB) met with Piers Verstegen to discuss working together on their Burrup Hub campaign. Piers was keen to hear about the effect of acidic emissions on the rock art and it was decided that this might become a separate focus of CCWA once they had launched their carbon emissions campaign.

On 31/7 FARA and JB had 3 important meetings –

- with Wesfarmers, urging them not to join Coogee on the Burrup...
- with Mike Rowe (DWER), asking for stricter emissions controls a Woodside's emissions data
- a follow-up meeting with Woodside's Exploration & Developments Team headed by Niall Myles in which he expressed anger that we had reported to the press that their old NWS infrastructure was faulty and they wouldn't be replacing it before its contract expires in 5-7 years time...JB again asked for Woodside's emissions data and they refused – why? something to hide? Jarrad Pittson agreed that there IS new technology available which can reduce damaging emissions to near zero!

Since the EPA invited submissions on Woodside's expansion proposal, Woodside invited us for two more meetings but we politely declined.

Our recent collaboration with CCWA has been most fruitful. We have encouraged our supporters to subscribe to their carbon emissions online petitions created by their Clean State team – and in mid February they put out one specifically on the rock art, just before our Woodside submissions were due!

On the more activist front we have strengthened our relationship with other lobby groups like XR and 350.org, working with them on various awareness-raising actions like Woodside's sponsorship of the Fringe Festival, participating in their camp opposite Parliament, and last Tues 10/3 joining the noisy presence in front of Parliament during RC's contribution to the Burrup Hub debate.

Our relationship with MAC has improved since SB became our official conduit with CEO, Peter Jeffries, keeping him up to date with our activities and checking on cultural protocols.

And it seems that Peter Jeffries is beginning to seek more direct dialogue with JB about the acidic threats to the rock art.

### 3. Legal Action

Last year we celebrated that Yara Pilbara had agreed, on advice from the State Solicitors Office (SSO), to apply for 2 new licences for their Burrup Fertiliser and TAN plants – but the process has not yet been resolved. A decision is now likely in late April. This is how it unfolded:

- **20/2** – EDO & FARA, represented by Greg McIntyre, met with State Solicitor to negotiate terms of Yara's new licence/s
- **13/3** – Justice Archer extended FARA Judicial review court hearing to March 2020 to allow time for YARA to prepare its licence/s
- **April** – Declan Doherty left EDO WA, and unfortunately, the new director Tim McNay has a conflict of interest due to previous professional associations. Rana Koroglu, EDO NSW was appointed to advise FARA, although this is not ideal due to the time difference and distance. We hope that Ruby Hamilton can again be our WA liaison once the national merging of the EDOs is complete.
- **October** – EDO contacted the SSO and we learned that Yara had applied for two licences (TAN and Fertiliser plants); since then, Marie Ferland has communicated with Rana & DWER re status of the Yara licence applications
- **4/3/20** – The judicial review was extended again to 13 May; Greg McIntyre advises we keep a close eye on Yara's activities on Burrup! If Yara's new licences are granted without adequate emissions controls, then we need to appeal; we would likely consult again with the Appeals Convenor.

### 4. Media

Throughout 2019 our website [www.fara.com.au](http://www.fara.com.au) and FB page has kept up with constantly updated news and requests for action... all we ask of you is to check the website occasionally and Like us on Facebook!!

The West Australian is (obviously) still reluctant to print our stories, apart from their online service which seems to take articles from Pilbara Media unfiltered! However Bret Christian of the Post Newspaper and Stan \_\_\_\_\_? of the Fremantle Herald are always keen to support the Burrup cause.

On the national front, Vicki Laurie manages to get the odd piece in The Australian, but the most regular producer of well informed and up-to-date industrial reports is SMH's Emma Young, closely followed by Calla Wahlquist of the Guardian. Our greatest dream is still to get a 4 Corners story on the Burrup – and it seems this might eventually happen with help from CCWA and their connections.

### 5. 2019 Murujuga / Burrup rock art tour

The 13th Burrup Murujuga Rock Art Tour took place from Sat 20 July – to Sun 28 July 2019 with 21 coach tourers, 14 independent travellers and 2 local day trippers. 24 of the participants were West Australians, the balance came from NSW, Vic, Qld and ACT – and the new menu of accommodation Options worked well for varying needs.

Robin Chapple, Ken Mulvaney and Gary Slee were once more our valued guides and botanist Vicki Long shared her excellent knowledge of the environment in an evening talk before joining the group

next day on country. Cross Country Charters provided a quality camping experience for our tourers and were most flexible with last minute unexpected changes to our schedule.

On the first day the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC) CEO Peter Jeffries gave our participants a Welcome to Country at Deep Gorge before they returned to MAC's headquarters for a group cultural induction. At lunch on the last day, Friday Tootsie Daniels, a member of the Murujuga Circle of Elders, came to meet the group. She spoke with power and purpose and was most generous and personal in her sharing.

Again after dinner speakers Ken Mulvaney, Robin Chapple and Vicki Long were very well received. The last night saw a relatively quiet final dinner with a talk on 18<sup>th</sup> century Whaling by tourer Peter Wolseley.

Our warmest thanks to everyone, including MAC and their Rangers.

The 2019 Tour turned a profit of \$10,038, which will help pay for expenses we incurred in advocating for the Burrup rock art. However cost increases, especially for accommodation, suggest we should raise slightly our 2020 base price for both coach and independent travellers.

June Moorhouse, our intrepid tour coordinator for the last few years, unfortunately needs a break and we salute her amazing tour leadership to date. This mantle now falls to committee members Marie Ferland and Susan Swain who we are sure will do an excellent job in changing circumstances.

## **6. Governance and Administration**

I cannot speak about the hard work done by our committee without first thanking John Black from the bottom of our hearts for all the incredible time, energy, scientific expertise – and personal finances – he has poured into our battle to save Murujuga over the last 10 years! Sometimes he becomes downhearted, as his culture of scientific honesty is at odds with the dubious shenanigans of politicians, but then he gives himself a shake and carries on selflessly. And we apologise *again* to his dear long suffering wife Claire! It has been such a privilege to work alongside this very dedicated and generous man over the last decade.

Marie Ferland has also been the backbone of our committee this year as she's spent countless hours perusing the fine scientific details of the various industrial proposals and then compiling the most professional submissions on behalf of FARA. She also put her hand up to take over the tour management from June – and probably rues the day she decided to retire from her previous paid job!

Chris Swain has proved to be a solid Treasurer with his finger well on the financial pulse of our organisation! And Susan Swain has done a great job updating our FARA constitution as well as working with 2019 tourer Colin Ridley to improve our online membership procedure. She loves delivering talks on the rock art (tell your groups!), will be busy helping Marie with the 2020 tour – and makes the meanest muffins for our monthly meetings!

Peter Schultz and Jenny Laker continue to manage our membership register and graphic design needs (see our amazing new t-shirts) and we wish Peter a sure and painfree recovery from his recent health issues. Sue Hartree has shown infinite patience at countless last minute amendments to our Mail Chimp newsletters, as well as passing on our FARA mail and Google alerts.

Clare Chamberlain has taken a temporary break from the committee, although kindly continues to update our website with vital information and links. Stephen Bennetts is an ace FB poster, wise counsel with his knowledge of Aboriginal culture and protocols – and instrumental in getting us to put our toe back into the activist pool.

Peter Shannon, one of our founding members, is still a welcome part of the team and Julianne Waldock continues to produce thorough minutes of our sometimes rambling meetings. And what would we do without Linda du Boulay, our quiet background helper and stalwart stall keeper at public events – pop along and see her in action when CCWA holds its Eco Fest in Hyde Park later this year!

In short, thank you to all our Committee members for the past year's sterling work – but may we remind you all that we are always on the lookout for new committee members to help refresh our organisation's outlook, skills and activities.

Finally, FARA would like to confer, in absentia, Life Membership on Melissa Parke and Greg McIntyre in appreciation for all the generous support they have given to us and our Murujuga cause.

Judith Hugo & Marie Ferland, Co-Convenors

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