



Friends of Australian Rock Art Inc.(FARA)

Convenors' Report,26 March 2022

We are pleased to present this report of FARA's activities since our last AGM on 20 March 2021. 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.

1. Key issues

1.1 Scarborough Gas Expansion

This last year our focus has still been on Woodside's plans to develop the Scarborough gasfield instead of the more expensive Browse Basin – an appalling project which will increase greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution way beyond the recommendations of the Paris Agreement (4 times that proposed by Adani) and emit even more acidic emissions to degrade the fragile patina of the Murujuga petroglyphs.

On 9 June 2021 Sanderson, then Minister for the Environment, requested that the EPA look into Woodside's emissions 'reduction' target for GHG, but no mention was made of nitrogen dioxide, the main source of acid rain and dry acid deposition, so harmful to the rock art as well as human health! We still await a reply from the Chair of the EPA on this subject.

When FARA appealed against the Works Approval approved for Woodside's Pluto Train 2, all our grounds were dismissed by DWER – again without fair or adequate substantiation. The overly cozy relationship between Woodside and the WA government, and the latter's determination to get this project up no matter the costs to the environment and Aboriginal heritage, are shameful particularly after the Juukan Caves debacle!

In January this year we objected strongly to the WA government's grant of land to Woodside on the Maitland Industrial Estate to build a massive solar plant to help supply Scarborough's energy needs. Commendable as this might sound, it would contribute to extending the life of the Woodside gas facilities by another 70 years as well as supply the Perdaman facility And it would also restrict the access of local Aboriginal custodians to their traditional ceremonial grounds. We still await a reply.

Fortunately, we have been joined by allies on multiple fronts – CCWA, Clean State, 350.org's Say NO to Scarborough Gas, Greenpeace, Market Forces – with very effective campaigns targeted at potential investors. We thank them most sincerely for their commitment to this vital cause.

In December 2021 the CCWA, with the guidance of the Environmental Defenders' Office (EDO), legally challenged Woodside for exceeding the conditions of its original Pluto 1 proposal – but unfortunately this was dismissed on a slim technicality to do with the timing of CCWA's challenge! We just hope that they will have more success with a second case later this year questioning Woodside's still outstanding environmental and heritage approvals for the Scarborough gas development.

1.2 Perdaman Urea plant proposal

Just as distressing is Perdaman, the company of Pankaj Oswal's ex-partner Vikas Rambal, which seeks to establish itself just next to Yara Fertilisers, and produce much-needed urea for the world – not really for Australian farmers...

After 2 submissions in 2020 to DWER and then Minister Dawson warning against the effects of Urea on the rock art and human health, Dawson replied that it all hinged on the final EPBC report and the results of the new Murujuga Rock Art Strategy (MRAS), which would seek to develop and implement 'a world best practice rock art monitoring program'.

As we now know, Prof Samuels' report was damning of the whole EPBC structure (later totally ignored by Minister Ley) and the MRAS is yet to produce any results after an inauspicious start!

So that leaves Perdaman's proposal still supported by the Commonwealth's Covid Recovery Plan and indirectly (via WA government) receiving \$ 255 million towards marine and port infrastructure!

Of course, Woodside's Scarborough approval is inextricably linked to Perdaman, as one of their main suppliers of gas - how neat for the WA government! Our only hope is that Perdaman still lacks a confident investor for its building costs and our allies are working hard on discouraging any investment via demonstrations, approach to potential investors, etc – your support is always welcomed!

But perhaps the strongest voice recently has been that of the Aboriginal custodians of Murujuga who have directly appealed to the Environment Minister, Sussan Ley, to intervene in the removal of several pieces of rock art from the proposed site. Her office has responded with a temporary stay of execution while the site is re-assessed – watch this space!

1.3 Yara Pilbara's licences and pending legal action

After DWER dismissed again FARA's merits appeals about Yara's new licences for their Fertiliser and TAN plants, (on the grounds of DWER's inadequate emissions controls and invoking the Precautionary and Intergenerational Principles) we appealed again to WA's new Environment Minister, while also filing another application for a Judicial Review...

We still await a response to our submissions against Yara Pilbara's plans for a 'green' hydrogen plant adjacent to its Fertiliser plant, involving 25 hectares of solar panels which will be a visual eyesore on the Burrup cultural landscape! - but towards which the WA government saw fit to contribute \$2 million even before it received official EPA approval!!

Hopefully Aboriginal opposition to this insensitive scheme will have some effect as it will obscure required sight lines from one traditional site to another across the valley.

In the meantime we got news that Yara Pilbara's ammonium nitrate plant is struggling with toxic ammonia spillages, apparently due to grossly inadequate building regulations, and then made worse by heavy rains which washed nitrate contaminated soil and groundwater into King Bay. Goodness knows what damage has been done to the mangroves, bird and marine life at King Bay.

FARA has taken DWER to task for its complete mismanagement of Yara Pilbara, ranging from its woefully inadequate licence conditions and its unsupervised building regulations, to its extremely irresponsible response to Yara's spillages – apparently it was self-reported as a contaminated site back in 2017 and it's taken until 2022 for DWER to get them to apply for a remedial Works Approval!

Of course, still no reply from DWER while Yara's ammonium nitrate plant is still allowed to continue production... may the spirits of Murujuga find some way of shutting them down permanently!!

But the most alarming news of late is that the Federal Minister for the Environment, Sussan Ley, has just proposed (hurriedly, pre-election) to devolve all environmental and heritage responsibility from the federal to the state governments... thus dismissing any system of checks and balances that would keep state governments responsible and answerable to transgression.

And to cement her party's stance, she has also announced that industrial proposals will be given Federal government financial support to fast-track their environmental approvals – one wonders whether she is the Minister for the Environment or the Minister for Industry?? This is a national scandal but unfortunately FARA's press release was only taken up by ABC Pilbara...

1.4 Research into the impact of emissions, and management

The Murujuga Rock Art Conservation research project set up at UWA by Dr John Black in collaboration with CRAR+M, as represented by Prof. Ben Smith, Professor of World Rock Art, is nearing completion. This research was made possible through the more than \$300,000 raised by the FARA established Crowd Funding campaign and numerous donations from the concerned public. Those of you who kindly contributed to our initial crowdfunding appeal will have received an update through a UWA Newsletter.

The research program has four major components:

- i. Identifying changes in rock surface patina and condition from pre-industrialisation of the area to the present, using archival photographic records of 24 petroglyphs spread across Murujuga;
- ii. Measuring the impacts of chemical emissions from industry on dissolution and flaking of the patina, compared with natural weathering;
 - a. Using artificial weathering chambers to examine changes in rock surfaces with changes in Karratha's climate, to understand the effects of acidic emissions compared with the natural environment (collaborative research conducted with the University of Bonn and a French scientist)
 - b. Using finely ground patina from Murujuga rocks to determine the rate of dissolution of manganese, iron and other elements in the patina from acidic and other compounds emitted by industry compared with deionised water and sea water;
- iii. Measuring the impact of nitrous emissions on patina forming microbes and the subsequent deterioration of the patina;
- iv. Evaluating and interpreting changes in the rock "brightness" on satellite images from the beginning of industrialisation to the present.

The comparison of archival photographs of petroglyphs with recent photographs of the same images has revealed that 50% of the studied petroglyphs showed indications of changes, and two showed substantial damage. The bulk of changes can be attributed directly to industrial activity in the area due to their relative proximity to industry. MAC gave approval this week to publish the images contained in the draft scientific paper presenting these results. This paper will be submitted to the journal *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* within the next few weeks.

A scientific paper from the Bonn research has been submitted and is currently being peer reviewed, and research on the finely ground patina is expected to be submitted for publication by mid-year. These two research projects confirm that pollutants from Murujuga industry, which increase rock surface acidity, dissolve essential elements in the rock patina that are needed for long-term preservation of the petroglyphs.

The microbiological studies have been on hold during Covid-19 because much of the research must be conducted at Murujuga. This week MAC gave permission for work to proceed, so collection of Murujuga rocks and measurement of microbial populations are expected to start in late April.

Landsat data from 1987 until 2017 are being analysed (by Dr Ilona Box and Professor John Richards) to assess whether changes in rock surfaces near the Woodside operations, where acidity has increased more than 1000-fold, are different from similar rocks on Dolphin Island, immediately north of the Burrup Peninsula. The results are to be examined by mineralogy specialists to determine whether the observed changes can be related to changes in minerals in the rock patina.

Many of you will remember Dr Ian MacLeod from the WA Maritime Museum who was initially extremely supportive of the campaign to demonstrate the scientific effects of pollutants on the rock art and was co-author with John Black and Ben Smith on the 2017 theoretical paper demonstrating that pollutants emitted on Murujuga will impact the patina.

MacLeod stated in an ABC interview in 2016 that 'as sure as night follows day, industry will destroy the rock art'. However, in mid-2018 he was employed by Yara Pilbara and subsequently he and Warren Fish wrote a paper stating that there is no adverse impact on the engraved rock art of Murujuga from industrial pollution.

A detailed review of that paper by UWA rock art specialists and others determined that the conclusion by MacLeod and Fish was unsubstantiated, misleading and potentially damaging for the long-term preservation of the Murujuga rock art. A peer-reviewed rebuttal of the paper was recently published (*The Impact of Industrial Pollution on the Rock Art of Murujuga, WA*, Rock Art Research, 2022, Vol 39).

The WA Government's fallback argument has always been that industry and cultural heritage can peacefully co-exist and all will be revealed once its latest Rock Art Monitoring program brings in results. However, established back in 2020 after a very closed tender process, this was stalled when one of the partners was dismissed for misconduct. We understand that monitoring work is now about to start but we cannot expect to see any results for another 4 years... so, the cumulative chemical emissions will continue unchecked, with the fragile rock art being eroded and degraded by increasing acidity.

Cold comfort is being told that if chemical emissions are found to be damaging the rock art, then steps will be taken to mitigate the damage – viz. getting industry to adopt current new technology and so lower its emissions (isn't that what we've been advocating all along?)

If only the Commonwealth EPBC Act would intervene here, but we now know that they wish to have no part in contentious state environmental and heritage issues!

1.5 World Heritage listing

Murujuga was placed in February 2020 on UNESCO's Tentative World Heritage list (WHL), and with the official application due in 2022, the Dept. of Conservation, Biodiversity and Attractions (DBCA) has

been busily working with MAC on the dossier to make the case that Murujuga indeed contains Outstanding Universal Values worthy of WHL protection.

In anticipation, MAC has started putting forward aspects of their plan to build an Interpretive Centre in Conzinc Bay, to be part funded by the various industries 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, MAC, CCWA, and various other lobby groups.

Very empowering this year has been working alongside CCWA, Clean State, and 350.org's *Say NO to Scarborough Gas* campaign – at last their awareness campaigns are reaching a far wider audience and they have tutored us wisely in how to work the machinations of bureaucracy!

And most meaningful has been our reconnection with the Aboriginal custodians of Murujuga and helping them find their own voice, in spite of the BMIEA's gag clause.

A sample of our meetings, submissions and appeals to DWER/ EPA/Appeals Convenor/the Minister to oppose the establishment of further industry on the Burrup, including:

- Meeting with DCBA and MAC re World Heritage listing – explanation of the process by Jessica Lindsay, Amy Stevens (MAC) and Terry Bailey (WHL expert), March 2021
- Meeting with new EPA chair, Prof Matthew Tonts, May 2021
- FARA Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the destruction of 46,000 year old caves at the Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, January 2021
- FARA Appeal against Woodside Burrup Pty Ltd Works Approval #W6332/2019/1 (Issued by DWER on 26/05/2021); Grounds submitted to the Appeals Convenor of WA, June 2021
- FARA Appeal against Woodside Burrup Pty Ltd Works Approval #W6332/2019/1; Outcomes Sought submitted to the Appeals Convenor of WA, July 2021
- FARA Appeal to the Minister for the Environment against EPA's decision to recommend approval of the Perdaman Urea Project, September 2021
- Submission to NOPSEMA relating to the Indirect Impacts from the Development of the Scarborough Gas Field on the Dampier Archipelago National Heritage Place, 16 January 2022

3. Media

Throughout 2021 our website 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!! And we look forward to showing you our new website in a few months' time.

Covid has definitely overshadowed the covert industrial dealings of our governments and we thank those members who have drawn our attention to various snippets in the media.

We have worked closely with various journalists – eg. Peter Milne of WAtoday/The Age/SMH, ABC Pilbara, Vicki Laurie of The Australian, and Jesse Noakes who got that excellent essay *Songlines or Pipelines in the Burrup?* into the February edition of The Monthly.

And we are extremely appreciative of all the press coverage of the Murujuga situation engendered by Piers Verstegen, Maggie Woods and the entire team at CCWA.

4. 2021 Murujuga / Burrup rock art tour

Last year a very successful tour to Murujuga (31/7 – 8/8) was led by Marie Ferland, our FARA Co-convenor. There were 25 very interested participants, as well as 7 people who joined for an individual day. Tour numbers (and the final profit) were lower than usual due to the inability of people from the eastern states to travel to WA.

To start the planning, Stephen Bennetts and Marie met with Patrick Churnside and Brian Wall, both of MAC, to discuss some changes to the tour based on concerns from the Circle of Elders about the cultural safety of tourers at particular rock art sites. Later, Ken Mulvaney met with the Circle of Elders on our behalf to advise them of which sites we'd like to visit and seek their approval.

For the first time FARA, had to apply to DBCA for its own Tour Operators licence which had to be approved by DBCA, MAC and the Murujuga Parks Council. As in the past, Cross Country Charters did an excellent job of facilitating the tour logistics – everything from the comfortable coach to the excellent catering. Additional requirements to meet Covid protocols were well managed and didn't cause unnecessary inconvenience.

We cannot thank enough our intrepid tour guides Ken Mulvaney (world expert on Murujuga rock art), Robin Chapple (who comes down from retirement Derby to join us) and Gary Slee, who has also kindly taken short tours for small groups at our request. A highlight of the tour was MAC Chair Vince Adams and DBCA/MAC Ranger Peter Cooper joining the tour for Tuesday.

The 2021 tour made a profit of \$2,734 which will help to keep our organisation going for a while longer.

5. Governance and Administration

Covid might have saved Prof John Black a lot in airfares again this year, but he has certainly been working alongside us in every way possible – submissions, Zoom meetings, and ongoing scientific investigations and publications. Again, we thank him most sincerely for his selfless devotion to Murujuga's precious rock art and the generous sharing of his scientific expertise.

Dr Marie Ferland, our co-convenor, has greatly assisted our committee this past year by perusing the fine scientific details of the various industrial proposals and then compiling the most professional submissions on behalf of FARA. As if that wasn't enough, she also volunteered to manage the 2021 tour and gave several lectures to educate people about the rock art of the Murujuga! Marie will be relocating back to NSW shortly and she will be sorely missed by us all – thanks so much, Marie!

Chris Swain has kept our Finances in good shape and Susan Swain, our Public Officer, has done a great job updating FARA's constitution and trying to improve our online membership procedure. She loves delivering talks on the rock art (tell your groups!) and has kindly agreed to step into Marie's shoes as my co-convenor, subject to approval at the AGM.

Peter Schultz and Jenny Laker continue to manage our membership register and graphic design needs and Peter, in spite of a crippling back problem, also kindly agreed to take over posting out our Mail Chimp newsletters once Sue Hartree retired from the committee.

Stephen Bennetts is our FB guru and we are most grateful for his experience and knowledge of Aboriginal culture and protocols in our recent negotiations with MAC. He has also been working closely with CCWA and the Aboriginal custodians up on Murujuga as they increase their public presence and voice about the impact of industrial emissions on their cultural heritage.

Clare Chamberlain has valiantly continued to update our clunky website with vital information and links and we look forward to a brand new website which is being expertly guided by her.

Julianne Waldock continues to produce her thorough minutes of our meetings and Linda du Boulay, our quiet background helper and stalwart stall keeper, still manages to attend some of our meetings in-between FIFO shifts.

And this year we welcomed a new committee member in Chris Brenton and look forward to training her in the art of submission-writing!!

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.

And a final word to you, our supporters – thank you for all your support in writing submissions, etc - please maintain the rage and spread the word as far as possible...

Judith Hugo & Marie Ferland,
Co-Convenors

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