

Chapter 7

Committee view

7.1 Murujuga, also known as the Burrup Peninsula, is home to one of the largest collections of rock art in the world. The petroglyphs are of immense cultural and spiritual significance to Aboriginal people, and of equally immense national and international archaeological and heritage value.

7.2 The Murujuga is a sacred place for five local Indigenous groups: the Ngarluma, the Mardudhunera, Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo, the Yaburara, and the Yindjibarndi. The area contains dreaming sites, ceremonial sites, shell middens, quarries, standing stones and burial grounds. The Murujuga is described as a place of worship and understanding where stories and law are written through the petroglyphs and the stone. Aboriginal people throughout the Pilbara believe that the petroglyphs are the work of creation spirit-beings known as Marrga who formulated the rules of social conduct for humans to follow. The petroglyphs are a permanent visual reminder of how the law should be followed, and are places of continuing spiritual power.

7.3 The petroglyph collection which includes the earliest known depiction of a human face, documents human presence in the area over an estimated 45,000 year timespan—the longest continuous production of rock art in the world. It includes images of extinct mega-fauna, Tasmanian tigers, hunting traditions, and mathematical and geometric forms. The collection also documents changes in the way humans reflected their presence in the landscape and their cultural practices over time. The petroglyphs reflect changes in environmental conditions with early artwork depicting terrestrial fauna and artwork from the Holocene period including images of marine fauna such as turtles, and fish.

7.4 The Australian Heritage Council reported in 2011 that the rock art collection represents a masterpiece of human creative genius and is one of the most exciting and significant collections of rock engravings in the world.

7.5 The committee recognises and acknowledges the vast cultural and historical values of the rock art of the Burrup Peninsula and is of the view that it is critical that the petroglyphs should be protected and conserved for current and future generations.

7.6 The committee acknowledges the substantial amount of work contained in this report and the information and opinions it contains. Senators have reached differing views on the issues presented and these will be outlined in additional comments. The committee thanks all those who participated in this inquiry.

Senator Peter Whish-Wilson
Chair

