



Government of Western Australia
Department of Water and Environmental Regulation

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MURUJUGA ROCK ART STRATEGY

2020–21 ANNUAL REPORT
on the implementation of the strategy



February 2022

Department of Water and Environmental Regulation

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The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation recognises the Traditional Owners and custodians of Murujuga; the past, present and future generations of Ngurra-ra Ngarli, and their ongoing connection to this sacred country.



1. Background

1.1 The petroglyphs of Murujuga

The Dampier Archipelago, including the Burrup Peninsula and surrounds, is traditionally referred to as Murujuga and is in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Murujuga, meaning ‘hip bone sticking out’ in the Ngarluma-Yaburara language, refers to both Land and Sea Country and consists of a narrow peninsula of land and 42 coastal islands, islets and rocks, and the surrounding sea up to 40 km from the port of Dampier.

Murujuga is home to one of the largest, densest and most diverse collections of petroglyphs (rock art) in the world. It is estimated to contain more than one million images, which provide an archaeological record of traditional use of the area over thousands of years. The engravings show human images and extinct animal species such as megafauna and thylacines (Tasmanian tiger), as well as existing birds, marine and land animals. The area also features middens, fish traps, rock shelters, ceremonial places and stone arrangements. The rock art has a deep meaning for the Ngurra-ra Ngarli (Traditional Custodians of Murujuga). It provides a tangible link from the past to the present through stories, songs, customs and traditional knowledge of the land and resources.

Murujuga hosts multibillion-dollar industries that significantly contribute to the local, state and national economy, and provide employment in the area. Industry on the Burrup Peninsula includes Rio Tinto’s Dampier Port operations, the North West Shelf Karratha gas plant, Woodside’s Pluto liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant, and Yara Pilbara’s liquid ammonia fertiliser

plant and technical ammonium nitrate production facility. Further expansion and future developments are proposed. Some of these are currently being assessed under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and the Western Australian *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act).

The Government of Western Australia is committed to protecting the rock art of Murujuga. It considers that the unique Aboriginal cultural and heritage values of Murujuga can continue to coexist with well-regulated industry and new economic opportunities that deliver benefits to the local community. Industry is required to apply best practice emission standards and technologies consistent with approvals under the EP Act.

The expanding tourism industry also provides important local employment and economic opportunities. The Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC), which represents the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Murujuga, is developing the [Murujuga Living Knowledge Centre](#) with support from the State Government and others. This state-of-the-art interpretative centre will showcase Murujuga’s rich culture and history.

1.2 Murujuga Rock Art Strategy

The State Government is partnering with MAC to oversee the implementation of the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy (Section 2). The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) has primary responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of the strategy.

The Murujuga Rock Art Strategy was released in February 2019. The purpose of the strategy is to protect the Aboriginal rock art on Murujuga from the potential impacts of anthropogenic emissions (emissions from human activities). The strategy establishes the framework for long-term monitoring and analysis of changes to the rock art to determine whether it is subject to accelerated change (Section 4). The framework provides a transparent, risk-based and adaptive approach for the management of impacts to the rock art that is consistent with the State Government's responsibilities under the EP Act.

The strategy includes:

- establishment of an Environmental Quality Management Framework, including the derivation and implementation of environmental quality criteria¹
- development and implementation of a robust monitoring and analysis program to determine whether change is occurring to the rock art on Murujuga (Section 4)
- scientific studies to support the implementation of the monitoring and analysis program and management (Section 4)
- governance arrangements
- a communication and engagement strategy (Section 1.4).

Five-yearly reviews of the strategy, or earlier as determined by the Minister for Environment, will ensure it remains relevant, supports appropriate governance procedures, and reflects the best available scientific knowledge and management practices applicable to protecting the rock art on Murujuga.

¹ Scientifically based limits of 'acceptable' change.

1.3 Strategy implementation

MAC and DWER are working in partnership to oversee the development and implementation of the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program.

In 2020–21, the State Government allocated \$432,000 to support the implementation of the strategy. This included funding:

- to support MAC with the implementation of the strategy and monitoring program
- for the independent peer review of the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program and scientific studies
- for the operation of the Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group
- to support the implementation of the strategy by the department.

Funding for implementation of the monitoring program is provided by the industry operating on Murujuga, through a memorandum of understanding with the department. In 2020, this included funding from Woodside, Rio Tinto and Yara Pilbara.

The department is required to provide an annual report on the implementation of the strategy to the Minister for Environment. This annual report provides an overview of the implementation of the strategy and key achievements from February 2020 to June 2021. This aligns the strategy with traditional annual reporting cycles.

Annual reports are published on the [department's website](#).

1.4 Communication and Engagement Strategy

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and DWER have prepared a Communication and Engagement Strategy for the Murujuga World Heritage Nomination and the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy (April 2019).

The Communication and Engagement Strategy provides a holistic approach to effectively and efficiently engaging with stakeholders and delivering key and consistent messages about the State Government's commitment to protecting Murujuga's rock art and the initiatives by which this will be achieved.

Central to this strategy is the implementation of the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program and the preparation of a World Heritage nomination.

It is primarily implemented by DBCA and the department, in consultation with MAC. Where appropriate, other State Government departments may also be consulted on the implementation of this strategy.

This strategy was updated in 2020 to update planned communications activities consistent with the progression of the World Heritage nomination and commencement of scientific studies to underpin the monitoring program. Many planned communications activities in 2020 were unable to progress because of COVID-19 restrictions, while other communication activities were moved online where appropriate. MAC and DWER are working to identify opportunities to showcase MAC's involvement in monitoring and other on-country work.

2. Partnership with Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation

MAC is the central organisation for developing and managing all research within Murujuga. MAC has an important leadership role in linking research to the cultural and strategic plan of Murujuga, under the governance and direction of the Circle of Elders. The *Murujuga Research Protocols* have been developed as a set of governing laws and principles to ensure research is conducted in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner. The protocols form the basis on which to build ethically and mutually beneficial research partnerships.

The State Government is partnering with MAC to oversee the implementation of the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy. This was formalised on 15 November 2019, when MAC and DWER signed a Partnership agreement. This establishes the working arrangements for effective and efficient cooperation to support the implementation of the strategy and the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program (Section 4), and other matters of mutual interest for the protection of Murujuga's rock art.

The Partnership is based on the principles of:

- mutual respect for knowledge, roles and responsibilities
- open, honest and transparent communication and consultation
- planning and working collaboratively.

In November 2020, the State Government extended its funding agreement with MAC for a further two years. This funding supports MAC's involvement in the development and implementation of the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program and assists with building MAC's organisational capacity.

3. World Heritage nomination

In August 2018, the State Government and MAC announced a World Heritage nomination would be progressed for Murujuga. MAC is working in partnership with the State Government to prepare the World Heritage nomination, in collaboration with the Australian Government and stakeholders.

Following the successful addition of the Murujuga Cultural Landscape to [Australia's World Heritage Tentative List](#) in January 2020, steady progress has been made towards the formal nomination dossier.

Led by MAC and DBCA, drafting of key sections of the nomination is now well progressed, with ongoing cultural and technical input provided through the established advisory framework; the independent World Heritage Advisor, the Murujuga Heritage Committee and Interagency Taskforce. These committees continue to meet regularly to oversee the development of the nomination, contribute to its content and facilitate community and stakeholder engagement opportunities. In early 2021, the committees began reviewing drafts of key sections of the nomination, an exciting milestone in the nomination process. DWER remains an active member of the Murujuga Heritage Committee and Interagency Taskforce.

As part of the nomination process, DBCA is reviewing existing protection and management arrangements, in collaboration with MAC and stakeholders. A new joint management plan for the islands for the Dampier Archipelago vested with the Conservation and Parks Commission is in preparation, and a recreation masterplan for these islands and the Murujuga National Park is in progress. This work will strengthen the nomination by demonstrating there are current and coordinated plans in place to protect the cultural, environment and tourism values of Murujuga.

Work has commenced in determining a proposed boundary for the World Heritage area by identifying where there is Outstanding Universal Value that can be adequately protected and managed. This work includes reviewing tenure and management arrangements, and transferring unused portions of land into the conservation estate, for potential inclusion in the World Heritage area.

Effective stakeholder engagement remains a key component to the success of this World Heritage nomination process. DBCA continues to implement the *Communication and Engagement Strategy for the Murujuga World Heritage Nomination and Murujuga Rock Art Strategy* and subsidiary *Murujuga World Heritage Communication and Engagement Implementation Plan*. In late 2020, DBCA and DWER reviewed the Communication and Engagement Strategy and subsidiary project-specific plans, to ensure they remain current and effectual.

The addition of Murujuga to Australia's World Heritage Tentative List was celebrated at an on-Country event in August 2020 when the new [Ngajarli Art Viewing Trail](#) was officially opened. This \$1.3 million project is a milestone for the area because it is the first recreation site to be developed within Murujuga National Park. Visitors now have improved access to viewing some of the rock art with a new walking trail and signage to educate visitors about the cultural significance of the area.

MAC and the State Government remain on track to achieving the goal of having the World Heritage nomination submitted by the Australian Government to the World Heritage Centre before the 1 February 2023 deadline. Based on this timing, the earliest Murujuga could be added to the World Heritage List is 2024.

4. Monitoring program

4.1 Overview

The purpose of the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program is to monitor, evaluate and report on changes and trends in the integrity of the rock art and whether the rock art is being subject to accelerated change. The focus of the monitoring program is to determine whether anthropogenic emissions are accelerating the natural weathering of the rock art. This will enable timely and appropriate management responses by the State Government, industry and stakeholders to emerging issues and risks.

The objectives of the monitoring program are to:

- obtain data for comparison against the environmental quality criteria to ascertain whether the environmental quality objective² is being achieved and the environmental value³ (the rock art) protected
- provide the Government, MAC, industry and the community with robust, replicable and reliable information on changes and trends in the integrity or condition of the rock art on Murujuga
- ensure decisions regarding the protection of the rock art are based on the best available science
- inform the evaluation of the effectiveness of any measures taken to mitigate adverse effects on the rock art, including efforts to protect the rock art.

The development and implementation of the monitoring program is informed by the findings and lessons from the past 15 years of scientific studies and monitoring of the rock art on Murujuga.

2 A specific management goal for a designated part of the environment that signals the level of environmental quality needed to protect the environmental value.

3 A beneficial use or ecosystem health condition that requires protection from the effects of emissions or environmental harm.

The monitoring program will address the limitations of the previous studies to deliver a scientifically rigorous approach to monitoring and analysis.

An important part of the monitoring program is the establishment of an atmospheric monitoring network on Murujuga. This will provide data on the composition and concentrations of contaminants that are potentially transferred from the atmosphere to rock surfaces, for the assessment of effects on the rock art.

The overall monitoring program has a staged approach over five years, with the first three years having a strong focus on development and refinement of the final monitoring program. This includes improved understanding of the system and interactions through on-ground monitoring studies.

There are several key parts to the program including:

- development and refinement of [conceptual models](#)
- monitoring studies related to anthropogenic emissions and the petroglyphs
- ongoing monitoring program of anthropogenic emissions and the petroglyphs
- development and implementation of the Environmental Quality Management Framework, as informed by the first three points.

Puliyapang Pty Ltd, a joint venture between Tocomwall and Calibre Ventures Pty Ltd, was engaged in February 2020 to implement a rock art monitoring program on Murujuga. The Puliyapang Pty Ltd contract was terminated on 30 April 2021 because of a breach of conditions.

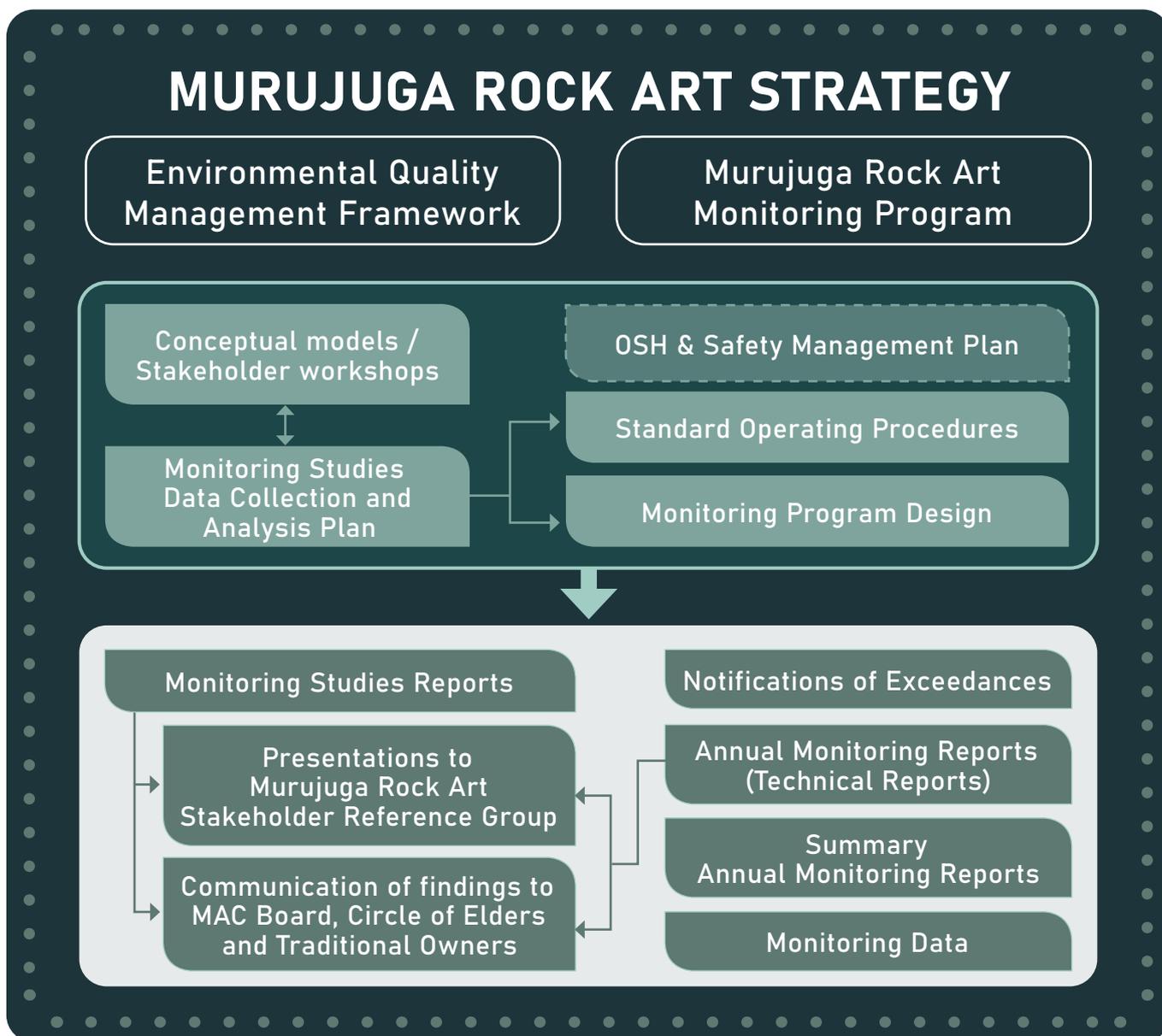
Calibre Professional Services One Pty Ltd was appointed in June 2021 to continue the work

previously performed through the Puliypang Pty Ltd joint venture. Calibre is providing project management services working in partnership with subject matter experts from Curtin University, Art Care and Chem Centre to ensure the program meets the expectations of being world's best practice.

The monitoring program is underpinned by an independent peer review process to provide

confidence in the scientific rigour and design of the monitoring program. Peer reviewers with national and international expertise in environmental quality management, statistical analysis, geochemistry, air quality and rock art monitoring and management have been selected to review key aspects of the program.

The key elements of the monitoring program are shown in the figure below.





4.2 Stakeholder Workshop

The first year of the monitoring program focused on reviewing existing knowledge and developing a scientifically rigorous monitoring studies program based on the best available knowledge, supported by independent peer reviews.

In May 2020, Puliypang, Calibre and Curtin University held a stakeholder workshop with members of the Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group (Section 5) and other technical experts. The purpose of the workshop was to inform the project stakeholders on the development of the conceptual model and the scope of the monitoring studies, which will inform the design of the monitoring program and derivation of the Interim Environmental Quality Criteria. Presentations were provided on the development of the conceptual model and monitoring studies, reflecting the multidisciplinary approach to the project.

Stakeholders were supportive of the approach and the breadth of expertise brought to the program.

4.3 Conceptual models

Conceptual models help to explain complex systems and inform their monitoring programs. Based on existing knowledge of the rock art on Murujuga and in other parts of the world, an initial set of conceptual models were developed that:

- outline the current understanding of the Murujuga Rock Art system, based on previous monitoring of the rock art and work on engraved rock art around the world.
- inform the scientific framework for monitoring studies of the rock art (Section 4.4)
- inform the development and implementation of an Environmental Quality Management Framework, including relevant indicators of environmental quality, and Interim Environmental Quality Criteria.

The current models consist of three main elements, each with a different purpose or approach:

- **Framework model:** provides an overview of our current understanding of the potential impact of anthropogenic emissions on the condition of petroglyphs. It includes critical interactions that will be investigated during the monitoring studies.
- **Stressor model:** indicates the key sources and types of natural and anthropogenic emissions, and their impact on the processes on the rock surface that may influence the condition of the petroglyphs.
- **Pressure-response model and narrative:** a communication tool to convey the key elements of the program, without the need for specialist technical or scientific knowledge. It is also selected to allow easy integration with the Environmental Quality Management Framework, particularly the selected environmental indicators.

4.4 Monitoring Studies Data Collection and Analysis Plan

While previous studies of rock art have informed the models, significant uncertainty exists about the effect of anthropogenic emissions on the Murujuga petroglyphs. The models will be refined as the outcomes of the extensive monitoring studies emerge and will include additional elements that convey more detail about the dynamics of the system.

The draft conceptual models were independently peer reviewed by Dr Patricia Warke, Dr Des Lord and Mr John Gross, each considered experts in their respective fields. The reviewers' complementary fields of expertise allowed for a comprehensive and robust review and substantial improvements to the models. This independent peer review process was completed in December 2020.

The [conceptual models](#) and [reports of the independent peer reviewers](#) were published in June 2021 and are complemented by an [interactive brochure](#) for members of the public focused on the pressure-response model. These conceptual models will be refined as our understanding of the rock art and its interactions with the environment are informed by monitoring studies.

The Monitoring Studies Data Collection and Analysis Plan describes the proposed field and laboratory collection program for the monitoring studies component of the program. This demonstrates how best practice principles will be applied to ensure a world's best practice monitoring program. The scope of the monitoring studies includes air quality monitoring, non-invasive field monitoring of rock art, and laboratory experiments on non-rock art samples.

There have been more than 15 years of previous studies on the Murujuga Rock Art by government, industry and academics. While the limitations of some of these studies have been acknowledged, it is likely that any changes in the rock art will be over a long time period. In 2020, Curtin University undertook a comprehensive critical review to understand whether the data from these studies could be incorporated in the monitoring program, particularly to understand longer-term trends of changes in the rock art. The critical analysis will also help us to ensure the monitoring program improves upon previous work.

From July 2020, a team of scientists from Curtin University have collaborated on the development of the Monitoring Studies Data Collection and Analysis Plan. This plan has been subject to a separate independent peer review process to the conceptual Models (Section 4.3), using a team of nationally and internationally recognised peer reviewers.

A key component of the plan is determining the number and location of monitoring sites, based on statistically optimised site selection process, endorsed by an appropriately qualified statistician and hypotheses to be tested (where appropriate). The finalisation of this process is the focus for 2021, with an aim to commence on-ground monitoring studies in 2022.

4.5 Circle of Elders and Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation involvement

MAC has a central leadership role in linking research to the cultural and strategic plan of Murujuga, under the governance and direction of the Circle of Elders.

As a long-term objective, MAC would like to assume responsibility for the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program. The department is seeking to support this objective by promoting employment and training opportunities for local Aboriginal people and businesses as part of the monitoring program.

MAC rangers will be directly involved in the development and implementation of the monitoring program. This will include working alongside the team of scientists undertaking:

- field work to collect field measurements and samples
- data management
- analysis of monitoring data and presentation and interpretation of monitoring results
- report preparation and the communication of results from the monitoring program.

This will provide the rangers with training and opportunities to gain new skills as the custodians of Murujuga.

In February 2021, Curtin University and the department presented the proposed monitoring studies and potential monitoring locations to the Murujuga Circle of Elders. Elders expressed support for the overall aims of the program and provided advice on cultural protocols and ceremonies required for monitoring sites. Murujuga Elders and rangers will continue to be involved in all aspects of the monitoring program.

4.6 Ambient air quality monitoring network

The State Government is considering the establishment of a long-term, coordinated ambient air quality monitoring network on Murujuga and in the surrounding area. The introduction of a centralised and coordinated monitoring network will expand the knowledge base to manage the air quality in the region and result in more informed decision-making.

GHD was commissioned to provide advice to support the development of a network suitable for monitoring human health impacts at Murujuga and neighbouring population centres, taking into consideration the existing and future emissions from industry, shipping, vehicles, port operations and other anthropogenic activities.

The department will undertake further work to establish this network in 2022.



5. Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group

5.1 Role and Terms of Reference

The Minister for Environment has established the Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group to facilitate engagement between MAC and key government, industry and community representatives on the development and implementation of the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy.

Dr Ron Edwards is the independent chair of the Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group, appointed by the Minister for Environment in September 2018.

The Terms of Reference for the Stakeholder Reference Group are to:

- contribute constructively to the monitoring and protection of rock art, being considerate of the views of all stakeholders. This includes the provision of advice to DWER and the Minister for Environment on the design, implementation and analysis of the scientific monitoring and analysis program
- consult, inform and educate other stakeholders on other matters referred by the department for input or comment, including further development of the strategy, implementation of the strategy and five-yearly reviews
- inform the State Government's broader consideration of other strategic issues relating to the protection of the rock art on Murujuga.

The Stakeholder Reference Group includes representatives from MAC, Australian Government and State Government departments, as well as the Pilbara Development Commission, the Pilbara Ports Authority, the Western Australian Museum, the City of Karratha, industry and scientists. The membership of the Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group is provided in Appendix A.

MAC is a permanent member of the Stakeholder Reference Group. The initial term of appointment for the Chair and other members is three years, after which the membership will be reviewed by the Minister for Environment.

The Stakeholder Reference Group meets at least annually, or as determined by the Chair. Secretariat support is provided by DWER.

The Stakeholder Reference Group has developed a Communication and Engagement Implementation Plan, which was reviewed and updated in October 2020. The Implementation Plan is included in the Communication and Engagement Strategy for the Murujuga World Heritage Nomination and the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy (Section 1.4). The Implementation Plan identifies key communication and engagement activities and timelines for engagement with stakeholders.

5.2 Stakeholder Reference Group activities

The Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group has convened eight meetings since its establishment in September 2018. Two of these meetings were held in 2020, including one using videoconference facilities as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Key achievements of the Stakeholder Reference Group in 2020 include:

- participating in an online stakeholder workshop with the contractor for the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program
- providing advice to the department to facilitate the development of the Conceptual Model and Monitoring Studies Data Collection and Analysis Plan for the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program (Section 4)
- reviewing its Communication and Engagement Implementation Plan.

Because of the restrictions and risks as a result of COVID-19, no community forums or events were held in 2020. The Stakeholder Reference Group will investigate opportunities to engage with the community in 2021, particularly in support of the monitoring program.

The Stakeholder Reference Group has received briefings and updates on a number of key matters relevant to the Murujuga Rock Art Strategy, including:

- activities undertaken by the Chair and the Chief Executive Officer, MAC
- progress on the Murujuga Rock Art monitoring program
- the Murujuga World Heritage nomination
- proposed ambient air quality monitoring on Murujuga
- updates from industry on Murujuga
- Yara Pilbara's rock art monitoring program
- the review of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*.

Following each Stakeholder Reference Group meeting, the Chair provides a communiqué to the Minister for Environment. Communiqués are published on the Murujuga Rock Art [webpage](#).

The Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group can be contacted via email at murujugarocksrg@dwer.wa.gov.au

Appendix A

5.3 Engagement with key stakeholders

To support the implementation of the Stakeholder Reference Group's Communications and Engagement Implementation Plan, the Chair regularly meets with key stakeholders. This has included meetings with:

- the Minister for Environment, the Minister's Chief of Staff and Ministerial officers
- the CEO of Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, Mr Peter Jeffries
- the Western Australian Chief Scientist, Professor Peter Klinken
- Directors General and Executive Directors of the department and other government agencies and public authorities represented on the Stakeholder Reference Group
- representatives on the Stakeholder Reference Group and senior officers from their respective organisations.

5.4 Review of Terms of Reference

In June 2021, DWER surveyed members' views of the Stakeholder Reference Group Terms of Reference. A report on the survey will be provided to members in late 2021.

Murujuga Rock Art Stakeholder Reference Group – members in 2020–21

Name	Affiliation
Dr Ron Edwards	Independent Chair
Mr Peter Jeffries	Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation
Ms Sarah McEvoy	Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
Mr Ben Peden	Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation
Mr Jeremy Elliott	Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage
Mr Allisdair MacDonald	Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
Mr Robert Brock	Pilbara Ports Authority
Mr Terry Hill	Pilbara Development Commission
Ms Anneliese Carson	Western Australian Museum
Cr Peter Long	City of Karratha
Mr James Barker	Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Mr Luke Blackburn	Yara Pilbara
Ms Travis Inman	Rio Tinto Iron Ore
Mr Adam Lees	Woodside Energy Ltd
Professor Jo McDonald	Centre for Rock Art Research and Management, University of Western Australia
Dr John Black	John L Black Consulting





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