

**DAMPIER ARCHIPELAGO — WORLD HERITAGE LISTING**

*Motion*

Resumed from 6 April on the following motion moved by Hon Robin Chapple —

That this house calls on the Premier to protect the most unique and largest collection of rock art in the world by nominating the Dampier Archipelago to the federal government for inclusion in the World Heritage List.

**HON HELEN BULLOCK (Mining and Pastoral)** [2.13 pm]: I did not intend to speak on this motion. However, it is now impossible for me to sit still, when four out of the six members for the Mining and Pastoral Region have spoken, and I feel compelled to put my view on the table.

I listened to Hon Robin Chapple's remarks with great interest, because I am interested in the arts. But I am more interested in the human development history at the time those arts activities, such as rock carvings, were taking place. I believe that everything existed or exists for a reason and has a story to tell. I am more interested in the stories that rock carvings have to tell, because through these stories we are able to get a glimpse into prehistoric human development that will hopefully enable us one day to provide the answer to the ultimate question of the origin of the human race—that is, where we come from. The Dampier Archipelago rock art collections might be able to provide us with a piece of the jigsaw puzzle that is vital in constructing the whole picture.

According to Hon Robin Chapple, a mass production of rock carvings took place on the Dampier Archipelago between 30 000 and 10 000 years ago. Those carvings depict a range of motifs, from spiritual beings and humanoids to fish and mammals, and even long-necked tortoises, sea turtles, emus, kangaroos and fat-tailed wallabies. The carvings suggest to us that, about 30 000 years ago, the Dampier Archipelago was a land of plenty. As Hon Robin Chapple has pointed out, food was plentiful and life was easy 17 500 years ago, so people were able to follow cultural pursuits. After all, art is a product of a wealthy society. Therefore, the flourishing rock art is evidence of the prosperity during that period. I can imagine that the people who lived on the Dampier peninsula during that period would have enjoyed long-necked tortoise soup or sea turtle soup. Perhaps they had an emu egg omelette for breakfast, and kangaroo steak for dinner. If that was not enough, they could always have fat-tailed wallaby stew for lunch, while they were carving away on these hard stones. After all, we have to admit that it was a lawless society. There was no Liberal Party to keep them under control, and there was not any wildlife protection legislation.

That is an obvious part of the history of the Dampier Archipelago as reviewed through those rock carvings. But the rock carvings also raise many unanswered questions. I have often wondered why such prosperity and such a plentiful environment lasted for so long. Apart from the massive quantity of rock carvings, were these people able to develop or establish anything more substantial, such as agriculture, farming or fisheries, and were they able to develop a primitive civilisation and social system? If the answer is positive, where are the remains of that? If the answer is negative, why is that the case? It is also puzzling that, for 20 000 long years, these people were carving away, day in and day out, and year in and year out, but, one day, everything stopped. Why? What happened?

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** Climate change!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** That is a very fashionable statement.

Among those carvings, “archaic faces” aroused the excitement of archaeologists and anthropologists.

In an expedition carried out in 1969, funded by *The Australian*, those archaic faces were also found across the north and centre of the Australian continent in remote valleys in the Cleland Hills, the Calvert Range and the Durba Hills—I hope I have got the pronunciation right—as Hon Robin Chapple mentioned in response to my interjection. Those archaic faces were described by anthropologists as “almost unbelievable” after they had suddenly encountered those heart-shaped faces—some with eyes like craters on the moon, some with hooked noses, and creatures with horns and faces showing laughter and sadness quietly resting among those other unusual carvings, such as symbolic totem tracks, circles and lines. It has been said that they are completely without parallel in ancient Australian art, along with other artefacts, such as the ancient skeletons, the skulls of men very close to Java Man, stone axes with ground edges at least 20 000 years old, pebble stone tools on the New South Wales coast, and stone core implements with a cremated man, 35 000 years old. These discoveries led to the thought that Australia might be in a position of significance in the search for the origins of modern man.

I have an account from the man who led the expedition in 1969, Mr Robert Edwards. He is the curator of anthropology at the South Australian Museum, and when he was reported by *The Australian* of Monday, 13 April 1970, he described the success of the journey and the discovery as follows —

“Over that great sweep of country there are all the signs of a break in time between the Aboriginal and the men who created this art.”

It is as though primitive people recorded their rough beliefs and crude religion as a sort of bible in the rocks—then suddenly stopped living, and then another man came and adopted the art as sacred and holding it in awe began to build his own ritual and ceremony around the sites.”

Further on in that article, *The Australian* commented on his remarks, which is interesting —

From South Australia to Alice Springs, eastward into western Queensland, into the Northern Territory, and westward across the border into Western Australia the story was the same — of two ancient cultures, with the tribal leaders always protesting that the rock art did not belong to their people — that it was non-human in origin and belonged to the Dreaming when the mythical creators shaped the land.

The rock art, they said, was on the rocks when they were all put into place.

The rock carving on the Dampier Archipelago is a piece of a jigsaw puzzle that may play an important part in piecing together all the clues to trace the origin of mankind on Australian soil. There is no doubt that it has significant preservation value.

The time from the great pyramids in Egypt, 3 000 BC, to the digital era today is but a mere 5 000 years. What has or has not happened during those 20 000 long years should interest everyone a great deal, along with the reasons why. The simple question of where we came from remains unanswered today. It is hard to believe that we share the same ancestors with apes and chimpanzees. Even if it were so, where did they come from? Can a single life cell such as a bacterial cell turn into an ape or a chimpanzee after 65 million years of evolutionary change and then turn into us? Do members not think about these questions sometimes when they have a spare moment?

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to thank Hon Ken Baston, who is not in the chamber at present, who refreshed our minds about the Burrup Peninsula being first discovered by the Dutch as early as 1628 when the Dutch East India Company recorded it on its map. I would like to add that the Dampier Peninsula was named after the English buccaneer William Dampier, who visited the area in 1699. He anchored in Shark Bay desperately looking for fresh water, but without any success. He and his crewmen briefly encountered local Aboriginal people; feasted on local delicacies, including green sea turtles; and recorded some plant specimens and local animal and marine life that he found on the island. He was also a naturalist. After one month they left without any fresh water being found. Interestingly, Dampier did not mention in his diary the rock carvings on the island. Another interesting thing is that even 300 years ago, the place was as dry as a bone. It is an interesting life. If members are interested, a biography of him was written by Diana and Michael Preston, which would be good, light reading for the Easter recess. In his remarks Hon Norman Moore, who unfortunately is not here, issued an invitation to the Labor Party to talk to the Liberal Party. I am not quite sure what he meant by that. He probably proposed that the Liberal and Labor Parties should talk to each other. It is certainly a thought worth exploring. He is here now.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** He has been away on urgent parliamentary business.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** It will be recorded.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! It is a convention that members come and go in this chamber from time to time, and it is not parliamentary to refer to members as “not being here” because we all know that, temporarily, members are out of the chamber for a variety of reasons on parliamentary business.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Thank you, Mr President. I thought I was commenting on his remarks. I am about to conclude my remarks now.

This motion seeks protection of the rock art found on the Dampier Archipelago. I support this motion. It ought to give archaeologists time to find all the missing pieces scattered around Australia, not only to piece together the whole picture but also to prevent activities that involve people crawling all over those treasures and sitting on top of them, as Hon Jon Ford mentioned in his remarks. We must take action to protect those rock carvings from further damage. Thank you, Mr President.

**HON WENDY DUNCAN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary)** [2.19 pm]: As Hon Helen Bullock noted, this is an area of great interest to members for the Mining and Pastoral Region. Therefore, I take this opportunity to take part in this debate and also to note that the information that has been discussed and provided during this debate has been very illuminating and, I think, of great importance to us all. I certainly have enjoyed listening to the depth of knowledge, particularly that of Hon Robin Chapple, about the Burrup Peninsula and the Dampier Archipelago area. As has been noted, it is situated in the Pilbara and comprises 47 islands and islets off the coast of Dampier. Of course, the township of Karratha and the Burrup Peninsula are part of that

area, some 1 550 kilometres north of Perth. The Yaburara Aboriginal tribe are the traditional inhabitants of the region, with the first European visiting there being William Dampier in 1699.

The Dampier Archipelago was included in the National Heritage List in July 2007, and it is, of course, home to some of the world's most impressive displays of ancient rock art. That has been described in some detail during this debate and also in the material that I think was distributed to most members of Parliament preceding this debate. I must say that I am the poorer for not having had the opportunity to join Hon Robin Chapple on one of his tours of the Burrup rock art and hope that I will be able to do so at some stage.

**Hon Robin Chapple:** You will be more than welcome.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** Yes. I certainly appreciate the incredible beauty and importance of this rock art. Also, just as an aside, I had the opportunity while I was in the Kimberley not long ago as the guest of Susan Bradley to look at some of the rock art there. I had described to me the age of some of this work and the implications of how the people came to be there and what their works of art mean. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing this art and I believe it needs to be preserved. It is interesting to note that this rock art in the Burrup depicts a heap of things such as spirits, animals and humans, as well as even the Tasmanian tiger, which brings to mind thoughts about the extent of our flora and fauna, and perhaps even climate change and how species range backwards and forwards over our planet as they adapt to the current situation.

The issue in the Dampier Archipelago is that major industries are there, such as mining, particularly iron ore, salt and liquefied natural gas. The Dampier port, which was built in 1966, remains one of Australia's busiest ports, exporting roughly 75 million tonnes of produce every year, which is approximately 25 per cent of Western Australia's export revenue. Oyster and banana prawn fisheries are also a part of the industry in that area. It is an area of great focus for our state, for our Pilbara Cities initiative and for this government's intention to make that part of the world an attractive place for Western Australians and Australians to live, work and invest. There is no doubt that it is not only houses, schools and hospitals that are important to the amenity of the community, but also the local art and cultural work, particularly the work of our own traditional owners that is there to be seen at the Burrup Peninsula.

However, I must say that I concur with the opinion of Hon Helen Morton, Hon Ken Baston and the Leader of the House that World Heritage listing is not essential to protect and preserve this iconic area. We have come a very long way since World Heritage listing began in that we are all very much aware of the importance of these parts of our environment. World Heritage listing is almost an admission that we are not capable of looking after our own resources and our own special places ourselves. Of course, the point that was made by members on this side is that through state and federal legislation, and particularly through the Conservation Legislation Amendment Bill that was passed most recently, we have the ability to manage this area. I believe that we very much value and wish to protect this area. I also have great faith in the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation and the Department of Environment and Conservation being able to come up with a joint management agreement that will be of great benefit to that area and also to the local traditional owners. I can see that, from that, they will be able to not only protect the area, but also take advantage of its great interest to people by providing interpretive information and education that will benefit not only those in receipt of that information, but also those who are delivering it—that is, the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation.

Definitely we need some control. We do not want people wandering all over the area. Definitely we need some interpretation so that the world can understand what a unique and wonderful part of the world it is, and definitely we need the state and federal governments involved in that, along with the traditional owners. However, the Nationals do not support World Heritage listing. It would take the control by our state out of our hands. I believe that we are well and truly capable of managing that unique area ourselves.

**HON ROBIN CHAPPLE (Mining and Pastoral) [2.27 pm]** — in reply: I seriously thank all members who participated in this debate. I believe I see the outcome of the debate, but some really honest and genuine concerns about the area have been expressed, and I thank members for that. I thank Hon Norman Moore, Hon Helen Morton, Hon Kate Doust, Hon Ken Baston, Hon Jon Ford, Hon Helen Bullock and Hon Wendy Duncan for their input. I suppose I should say that from the outset I was approached by a number of members who would like to visit the area. This was even mentioned in the debate today. I can assure members that, should they have time, they only need to tap me on the shoulder and I will be there with them to show them around, because it is something that I am very passionate about and very inspired by.

In the short time I have, I will not go back and deal with all the points raised specifically by members. However, a number of matters were dealt with. One of the issues that I want to touch on first is the lack of surety about which World Heritage criteria were met. I refer to a document provided to Hon Malcolm Turnbull in making his assessment. It is by the archaeologists and anthropologists who did the assessment for him. It reads —

For monuments and sites to be included in the World Heritage List they must satisfy at least one of six criteria; four of which are relevant to the archaeology of the Dampier Archipelago. These criteria are considered in turn ...

*Criterion 1: The property should represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.*

And the assessors agreed to that criterion. It continues —

*Criterion 3: The property must bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared.*

...

*Criterion 5: be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.*

...

*Criterion 6: be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance ...*

There are a number of other criteria under that criterion. It was concluded that the Dampier Archipelago was one of the few places in the world that met not only one criterion, but also four of the six that are required for a nomination to be put forward.

Comments about industry were made. BHP Billiton Ltd decided to establish its Scarborough development at Onslow on the basis that it considered that the Dampier Archipelago met World Heritage List criteria. It made the decision to locate the development at Onslow because it did not wish to be seen to be establishing it on the Dampier Archipelago and, at some level, to be seen as pariahs in doing so. Interestingly, I also caught up with my friends from Apache Energy at the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association Ltd conference in the past few days, and they reminded me that their decision to go to Devil Creek rather than the Burrup was also made on the basis of world heritage criteria.

There are a few people I want to mention who have, in many cases, been mentors to me during my journey of learning about the issues of the Dampier Archipelago and the art. The first person I must mention is Professor Patricia Vinnicombe, who formed an important part of the Burrup Rock Art Monitoring Management Committee. Unfortunately, she died in Dampier several years ago after doing some work on the Burrup Peninsula and the anniversary of her death was about two weeks ago. She went back to the hotel and basically suffered a stroke or a heart attack and was never able to visit her beloved Burrup again. Patricia Vinnicombe was world renowned. She wrote the book *The People of the Eland*, which was the first book that looked at the social and archaeological interplay in rock art around the world. That was about the people of the Eland in Africa. She went on to the University of Cambridge and then eventually came here and studied with Professor Sylvia Hallam in Western Australia. She went on to become, one might say, the penultimate expert on the rock art of the Dampier Archipelago. If I have time, I will read a passage from Patricia shortly. I wish to identify a number of other persons who have been champions, including Ken Mulvaney, the son of Emeritus Professor John Mulvaney and who has just completed his PhD on the Burrup; Jo McDonald and Peter Veth, two other eminent archaeologists from Australia who have spent a massive amount of time trying to glean as much information about the Burrup and the Dampier Archipelago as they could; and Robert Bednarik, who was one of the very first explorers of the area and has made it his life's work to work with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to ensure that the Burrup Peninsula makes it onto the World Heritage List.

I really took to the point that Hon Helen Bullock made about ancient cultures. There is, at some level, an amazing amount of information about how civilisation dealt with the last ice maxim. Who were the people before the ice maxim and who were the people afterwards? I believe that they were one and the same, but the ice maxim that led to about 500 to 1 000 years of drought in Australia had an indelible impact on the Indigenous people. Quite clearly, that period changed their culture. When I hear the two phrases used by modern Indigenous people of the Dreamtime or when the land was soft, I wonder whether they might refer to oral history about the time when the land was a land of plenty. That is a supposition that I make; it is not backed up by any others. But it tends to fit with this whole model of a lush environment prior to the last ice maxim and an arid and harsh environment post the ice maxim.

I thank members for their comments. I would also like to read some words from Professor Patricia Vinnicombe. The passage I will refer to was written in 1999. It states —

... the number of individual motifs inscribed on the boulders of the Dampier Archipelago must be numbered in the millions. This prodigious human effort represents a substantive and irreplaceable

cultural documentation of the Aboriginal past unparalleled in any other area of comparative size. The only area I have seen —

Remember, she has travelled the world widely —

with a comparable richness of art is the Kakadu National Park, which is on the World Heritage register. In my view, the Dampier Archipelago, for both heritage and landscape values, should be similarly listed.

I know that many colleagues of Pat Vinnicombe share her views. There is a degree of sadness in me knowing that this motion, which she and others of her ilk strove so hard for, will most probably not succeed today. At a very personal level, I am sad that I have not been able to achieve the aspirations of people whom I am very proud to have known. On that strength, I ask members to support the motion.

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (12)

Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm  
Hon Helen Bullock  
Hon Robin Chapple

Hon Sue Ellery  
Hon Adele Farina  
Hon Lynn MacLaren

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich  
Hon Linda Savage  
Hon Sally Talbot

Hon Ken Travers  
Hon Alison Xamon  
Hon Ed Dermer (*Teller*)

Noes (17)

Hon Liz Behjat  
Hon Jim Chown  
Hon Peter Collier  
Hon Mia Davies  
Hon Wendy Duncan

Hon Phil Edman  
Hon Philip Gardiner  
Hon Nick Goiran  
Hon Nigel Hallett  
Hon Alyssa Hayden

Hon Col Holt  
Hon Robyn McSweeney  
Hon Michael Mischin  
Hon Norman Moore  
Hon Helen Morton

Hon Simon O'Brien  
Hon Ken Baston (*Teller*)

---

Pairs

Hon Jon Ford  
Hon Giz Watson  
Hon Kate Doust

Hon Brian Ellis  
Hon Max Trenorden  
Hon Donna Faragher

Question thus negatived.