

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS — SHARK BAY ARTEFACTS

1195. Hon Robin Chapple to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Culture and the Arts:

While at Shark Bay, the French engaged with Aboriginal people, who were from the Malgana tribe, the traditional custodians of the Shark Bay area. Artefacts being an extensive shell collection, weapons and a 'Hairbelt' were diarised as being given to the French, by the Malgana people, in exchange for castanets and other gifts during their encounter. It has been recorded that the artefacts were taken back to France to be displayed in the Louvre:

- (a) is the Minister aware of the artefacts being taken;
- (b) is the Minister aware of the 'Shark Bay Rendezvous–Festival de Freycinet 1818 – 2018', which aims to commemorate the landing at Shark Bay of the French expedition led by Louis de Freycinet, on the *Uranie* on 12 September 1818;
- (c) will the Minister help to repatriate the artefacts to have them displayed permanently in the Shark Bay Cultural Centre in time for the festival;
- (d) if no to (c), why not;
- (e) is the Minister aware of 'Great Uncle Harold Charles Poland' of the 2/32 Battalion who served in the Middle East and New Guinea, where he died in action and was buried where he fell and was interred in January 1944 in the Lae War Cemetery; and
- (f) what assistance can the Minister offer to return the remains to their rightful place of belonging?

Hon Sue Ellery replied:

- (a) The French scientific voyage, led by Captain Louis de Freycinet on board the *Uranie*, arrived in Shark Bay on 12 September 1818. Archival records, such as the diarised account from the expedition illustrator Jacques Arago, do refer to such exchanges during their short time on Peron Peninsula.

However, on 13 February 1820, the *Uranie* was wrecked in the Falkland Islands. Diary entries from de Freycinet refer to the loss of several cases of biological specimens that had been stored in the hold. Illustrator Arago itemises his loss of 'the collection of shells which I had gathered at every place where we stopped; the different arms of almost every nation on earth; rare birds and curious reptiles; my linen; my books; ten portfolios of sketches and finished drawings; all – all were engulfed...' (Letter 154, February 1820). Their main salvage operations when the *Uranie* was wrecked focussed on their provisions as well as muskets and ammunition. Some objects, such as de Vlamingh plate, survived and was presented to the Académie Française on their return to France.

The WA Museum is not aware of these items arriving in France to be displayed in the Louvre or any other museum. Also, although the French explorers exchanged goods and materials with the Aboriginal inhabitants of Shark Bay on Peron Peninsula, the fate of any other objects acquired in Shark Bay is unknown.

- (b) The Shark Bay Rendezvous 'Festival de Freycinet' is taking place on 21–23 September 2018. The program is being developed and funded by the Shire of Shark Bay.

The WA Museum is a partner in the Australian-wide travelling exhibition, *The Art of Science: Baudin's Voyagers 1800 – 1804*. Currently on display at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, this exhibition will open at the WA Maritime Museum on 13 September 2018. It will include a WA Museum curated display specifically related to the de Freycinet visit to Shark Bay. As part of this exhibition, a temporary exhibition is also being developed that will be installed at the Shark Bay World Heritage Discovery and Visitor Centre as part of their local commemorations. The State Library of WA is providing a digital copy of the Freycinet Art collection as part of the display.

- (c)–(d) See (a) and (b).
- (e)–(f) Exhumation and repatriation of service personnel is the responsibility of the Department of Veterans Affairs.