

Media Release – 8/10/2020

Deep concern about draft WA Heritage Bill posing “very high risk” to Indigenous heritage

The Australian Archaeological Association Inc. (AAA) and the Australian Indigenous Archaeologists' Association (AIAA) are deeply concerned the Western Australia Draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2020 will not meet its intended goals. Public submissions on the draft Bill close tomorrow (Friday 9 October 2020).

The President of the AAA, Tiina Manne, says the draft Bill needs to be amended as it currently poses a very high risk for Aboriginal communities, industry and heritage practice.

“The issues and impacts upon Aboriginal cultural heritage that have been highlighted recently through the Juukan Gorge tragedy will be repeated time and again, unless there is proactive legislation in place that creates a better system for everyone,” she said.

The AAA and AIAA said the draft Bill must provide Aboriginal Traditional Owners greater involvement in decision-making and review provisions rather than continuing to favour proponents, the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council and the Minister. The draft Bill continues to facilitate development approvals rather than protecting and celebrating Aboriginal sites and cultural landscapes. Other concerns include that the fundamental steps of identifying and understanding Aboriginal cultural heritage have not been included in the Bill and the vague and inconsistent use of definitions within the Bill provides opportunities for individuals to exploit loopholes. There is also the need for the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council and Local Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Services to be permanently funded and adequately resourced.

The President of the AIAA, David Johnston, said the Commonwealth Government must assume responsibility and accountability to protect Indigenous heritage at a national level.

“Indigenous communities must also carefully consider who is advocating for ‘us’ on the heritage reform agenda,” Mr Johnston said.

The draft bill is an historically important opportunity to improve the recognition, respect and management of cultural heritage in Western Australia. AAA and AIAA therefore strongly urge the Western Australian Government to keep working to improve the draft Bill, through genuine collaborative involvement of Traditional Owners and heritage practitioners, and through incorporating the above amendments, so that respectful, positive conservation and management of Western Australian Aboriginal heritage will be enabled, and clarity and certainty for all parties involved will be provided.

For more information please contact:

Tiina Manne
president@australianarchaeology.com

Dave Johnston
0412 211 137



**AUSTRALIAN
INDIGENOUS
ARCHAEOLOGISTS'
ASSOCIATION**

About AAA:

The Australian Archaeological Association Inc. (AAA) is the largest archaeological organisation in Australia, representing a diverse membership of professionals, researchers, Traditional Owners, students and others with an interest in archaeology. As stated in the AAA Code of Ethics, AAA recognises that while there are many interests in cultural heritage, we specifically acknowledge the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples. We strive to promote the study and conservation of cultural heritage.

About AIAA:

The Australian Indigenous Archaeologists Association (AIAA) is an entity staffed by volunteer members and sub-members of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with qualifications in archaeology, heritage management, heritage consultancy and history. Association members also include students and lay members of the Australian community.