



AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTING ARCHAEOLOGISTS INC

AACAI statement on the destruction of the Juukan Gorge Rockshelters

The Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists Inc (AACAI) expresses its profound sorrow over the destruction of the Juukan Gorge rockshelters in Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (PKKP) country in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

The Juukan Gorge rockshelters comprised one of the most important research sites in the Pilbara, with outstanding archaeological, scientific, ethnographic and cultural significance. It was a place of deep connection for PKKP Traditional Owners to their ancestors and country. Juukan 2 contained evidence of human occupation of over 46,000 years including the first clear evidence for occupation through the last Ice Age. Among the recent discoveries at the site are grinding and pounding stones, a 28,000 year old pointed bone tool, and a 4,000 year old plaited human hair belt, the DNA of which is directly associated with contemporary PKKP.

We acknowledge that the proponent was legally permitted to destroy these places under a Section 18 consent granted by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs in 2013, but this regrettable incident highlights major flaws and inequities in the current *WA Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and its administration. The current legislation does not provide for the addition of important new information and changing significance of places, nor does it give Traditional Owners or other interested parties the right to appeal against the granting of Section 18 approvals.

AACAI strongly urges the Western Australian Government to address these problems and enact provisions in the new draft Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act to ensure that this does not happen again. The new Act must ensure that cultural, archaeological, scientific, national and other values are protected; that new evidence for values and significance are catered for; and that heritage agreements between proponents and Aboriginal communities are robust and equitable. We call for the establishment of an independent heritage appeals tribunal.

The destruction of these places represents a great loss to the PKKP people and to Western Australia. That it occurred on National Sorry Day further undermines the decades of collaboration, relationship-building and hard work towards best practice cultural heritage management and reconciliation. AACAI acknowledges the deep hurt and grief that it has caused PKKP and we extend our condolences to them.

Martin Lawler
AACAI President

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AACAI WA Chair