

Purnululu National Park (Australia)

No 1094

1. BASIC DATA

State Party: Australia

Name of property: Purnululu National Park

Location: Western Australia

Date received: 25 January 2002

Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*. In terms of *Operational Guidelines* para. 39, it is also be a *cultural landscape*.

[Note: The site is nominated as a mixed cultural and natural site. IUCN will assess the natural significances, while ICOMOS assesses the cultural significances.]

Brief description:

Purnululu National Park in Western Australia is closely associated with traditional owners whose origins in the area lie tens of thousands of years ago. The major natural features, notably the creeks, water-holes and Bungle Bungle Range, are not only parts of their environment and sources of their livelihood, but crucial places in their culture.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

Purnululu National Park is in the East Kimberley Region of north Western Australia, in the drainage basin of, and some 400 km south of, Joseph Bonaparte Gulf.

Its title comes from the regional name in the Aboriginal Kija language for the sandstone of the Bungle Bungle Range (*see below*). The Park includes the whole of the Bungle Bungle Range (ca 45,000 ha), mainly at an elevation of 500-600 m. The Durack and Osmond Ranges rise to an elevation of 500 m. and more on its west; rocky terrain at 200-500 m elevation lie to its south and east.

The area proposed for inscription is the whole of the National Park (239,723 ha). Its southern and eastern boundaries respectively follow the Panton and Ord Rivers; its western boundary is of two lengths of straight line trending south-north and drawn without apparent reference to topography; and its northern boundary follows another river, Osmond Creek, until becoming another straight line, this time west-east.

This configuration excludes the junction of the two Rivers, which is in neither the core nor buffer Zones. The straight lines 'reflect cadastral rather than biophysical features and hence in some places they are difficult to define on the ground or to manage'. A buffer zone is provided by the Purnululu Conservation Reserve, a ca 1-10 km-wide, geometrically designed strip of land on the north and

north-west only. No buffer zone on the other sides is proposed in this nomination.

The Park is located 'in the transition zone between the savannah and arid environments of tropical Australia'. The climate is of typically dry monsoonal character with two distinct seasons: hot, wet summers (the wet season) and warm, dry winters (the dry season). Mean annual rainfall is ca 600 mm, falling mainly between December-March. Run-off and evaporation ensure the presence of very little permanent surface water.

Aboriginal use of the area has been 'primarily focussed along the Ord River, Red Rock Creek and Osmond Creek', but occupation and use of natural resources has occurred widely. 'Aboriginal people sought out and used specific plants and animals throughout the [rocky landscape] while pastoralists took advantage of the grasslands of the sand plains and Ord River Valley.'

The inhabitants of and visitors to the Park, their lifeway and beliefs are crucial to this nomination.

The following are the key cultural qualities of the site. These include both tangible and intangible qualities:

Intangible cultural qualities:

- Association with Aboriginal cosmology;
- Association with Aboriginal land use;
- Reflection of Aboriginal languages;
- Association with Aboriginal knowledge.

Tangible cultural qualities:

- Archaeological sites;
- Rock art.

Intangible cultural qualities:

Association with Aboriginal cosmology: The Purnululu landscape is intertwined with the living religious traditions and beliefs of *Ngarrangkarni*, an indigenous Aboriginal belief system popularly referred to as 'Dreaming' or the 'Law'.

Ngarrangkarni is seen as a complex fusion of ancestral beings, the creation, events long past, laws, ceremonies and rituals – all underpinned by the idea that *Ngarrangkarni* formed the landscape and thus landscape formation is ongoing. Traditional owners see landscape features as reflecting ancestral beings and events, and the names given to features reinforce this connection. The landscape therefore is a living reminder of the presence and power of *Ngarrangkarni*.

Ngarrangkarni gave water to the land and shaped the country. Water was put in the country by the rainbow snake, *Kaleruny*, ... [who] also gave people their languages.' Animals naturally feature strongly in this belief system: for example waterfalls and rapids, because they prevented fish from travelling further upstream, are seen as crocodiles turned into stone. 'People explain the features of the Purnululu region through narrative rather than definition.'

The process of creating and then melding with the landscape means there is an intimate association between people and the land, with the two becoming inseparable. In

this way, the landscape is a cultural artefact that buttresses the social and economic qualities of contemporary life.

Phyllis Kaberry, an anthropologist who worked with the Aboriginal women of the East Kimberley region of the 1930s, describes in her words and those of her informants, how people think of *Ngarrangkarni*:

'[She] does not view her country as so much geological strata, as so much sand, stone and spinifex. The boulders and the pools are *Ngarrangkarni*; that is, they belong to the past and to the totemic ancestors. When this word is used it always implies unquestionable finality on the subject at issue; *Ngarrangkarni* stamps a practice as legal; it invokes a religious sanction for its performance.'

Association with Aboriginal land use:

- Traditional land ownership:

Aboriginal people in Purnululu and East Kimberley region have strong systems of traditional land ownership, which continue to be practised despite the substantial disruption caused by European settlement. These systems are similar to those found elsewhere in Aboriginal societies.

Traditional ownership of land is much more than a question of geography. The societies of East Kimberley can, like other Aboriginal societies, be termed 'religious societies' as land, and indeed all aspects of society, are thought of in spiritual and religious terms rather than material ones.

On its own, traditional ownership of land is not the only important factor in rights to land. The ways in which people look after this land is important as well, including knowledge of appropriate ritual and belief systems, the continuing performance of ritual cycles, acquaintance with major sites and site complexes, possession of sacred objects and general continuing interest in the area.

- Linking natural features to personal identity – Narraku:

All of the varying natural features associated with the watercourses – rock pools, rocks, and trees – are named and closely linked to social and economic activities.

Natural features are also connected to personal identity. The name of a landscape feature may be given to a person and the term *narraku* refers to the relationship between the landscape and person thus created.

- Seasonal migrations:

Seasonal migrations were complex and linked to judicial use of fire to maintain ecological diversity and the desire to optimise variety in diet, through harvesting the considerable ecological resources – both plants and animals – at the best time of year.

Prior to European contact, the people of the Purnululu region, like other Aboriginal people in Australia, had developed strategies for managing the environment in such a way that it was maintained as a sustainable system. People recognised the interconnections of species through food chains, understood the actions of the seasons on resources, and intervened in ecological relationships through the use of fire, selective gathering and hunting, food taboos, and religious ritual. Women practiced a selective harvesting of resources that recognised that plants

and other resources are self-generating and must not be overused. Not all of a resource was harvested, so that sufficient would be available next time the area was harvested.

- Hunting and gathering:

Purnululu reflects a persistent hunting and gathering tradition linked to the particular 'transitional' climate of the area. The traditions are thus different from hunting and gathering traditions in other parts of Australia, such as in the Kakadu Park with its monsoon climate and Uluru-Kata Tjuta national park in the desert regions.

Hunting and gathering in Purnululu was, and still is, characterised by a response to a rich ecological diversity. In the rainy season, berries, fruits, wild-honey ('sugarbag'), frogs and white ant larvae are plentiful, in addition to game and fish. In winter, lily-roots and seeds, yams, tubers, nuts, grass seeds, pandanus and baobab nuts are collected by the women, and later in September grubs are found in river-gums, and lily-roots are dug from the mud of the drying water of river beds or billabongs. Fish, game, reptiles, echidna and birds are secured by men most of the year round, although at some seasons they are better in quality than at others.

- Exchange networks:

Barter was a significant factor in Aboriginal economy and one that was linked to specific places in the landscape. The widespread exchange network, called *winan*, stretched 600 km from west to east Kimberley and linked in to system in the Western desert. Item exchanged included tools, weapons, raw materials and foodstuffs. Gathering places such as Ngirriyiny on the Ord River apparently used to attract large numbers of participants and were in effect markets.

Reflection of Aboriginal languages: Four languages were spoken throughout this region: Kija and Miriwoong, connected to the western and northern parts of the Park, and Malgin and Jaru to the southern and eastern parts. The latter two are members of the Pama-Nyungan linguistic family that is spoken throughout the desert regions, including by the Anangu of Uluru-Kata Tjuta, while the former two are members of the Jarrakan language family.

The distribution of these two distinct language families mirrors the transition between arid desert and monsoonal savannah environments and thus reflects major social, religious and cultural differences between the two groups.

Tangible cultural qualities:

Archaeological sites: The traditional owners of the middle Ord Valley assert that their connection to their country extends back to the time during which the features of the landscape were first formed. Results of archaeological research support the argument for a long and continuous occupation of this part of northern Australia, extending back tens of thousands of years.

At Lake Argyle, less than 100 km downstream from the Purnululu National Park, radiocarbon dating demonstrates occupation of the Ord Valley for at least the past 20,000 years. The evidence also infers the seasonal occupation of the rock shelters based on the presence of fragments of goose (*Anseranas semipalmata*) eggshell in the Miriwun

deposits. As *Anseranas semipalmata* breed and lay eggs during the wet season, it is suggested that the uplands were perhaps occupied during the wet seasons and riverine areas during the dry season.

Rock art: The rock art at Purnululu has yet to receive research attention equivalent to that given to other rock art sites in Australia. A three month survey in 1988 recorded over 200 sites. The paintings depict a range of animals including crocodiles, turtles, fish, kangaroos and emus. As well as human and snake-like figures, the sites also include stencil of hands, mostly in red ochre and also representation of boomerangs and spears.

Paintings 'are usually maps of their own country, or of country to which they are related, giving them the authority to depict it. Paintings may also illustrate a story...'. The rock art may well have accumulated over a long time but dating it scientifically has not so far been attempted in a systematic programme. It is known that some images were made just a few decades ago.

The 'Turkey Creek artists', whose art originated in the discontent and frustration of Aboriginal people at not being able to visit their own country, demonstrated in the 1970s the living nature of this artistic tradition in expressing relationships between people and landscape. The presence of examples of the local art in galleries through Australia and in private collections elsewhere, suggests that others find in it considerable significance: the Purnululu 'artistic expression of the connections between, land, myth and history is now recognised as providing a unique contribution to the development of international art movements [and in trying] to best express the connection between humanity and land...'.

History

Human activity in the area has occurred over some 40,000 years. Radiocarbon dating places the earliest known occupation of the Ord valley, downstream of the Park, some 20,000 years ago. Long-term use of the area is suggested by a plentiful archaeology, as yet incompletely discovered.

The first survey of the area was in July 1879. The first colonists arrived in the Middle Ord region in the mid-1880s. Gold was discovered 1885 but stock raising became the main activity. 'By June 1884 the first mob of 4,000 cattle were brought into the Ord River grasslands...' 6,000 followed the following year. By 1902 there were some 47,000 cattle.

Overstocking of cattle, which led to over-grazing 'set in train the destructive process of massive landscape erosion', a process which saw the Aboriginal population involved in unpaid seasonal labour on pastoral stations, while their natural food resources were diminished. The indigenous population decreased by perhaps as much as 50%.

From 1967 procedures to reverse this process were started. Control of stock and re-vegetation programmes were put in place and the 1968 Pastoral Award stopped the abuse of Aboriginal labour. However, in moving people out of the cattle stations, the measures helped create new living sites - 'humpies' - which came to be characterised by social deprivation.

'From around 1985 onwards large numbers of cattle and donkeys (25,000 and 4,000 respectively)' were removed to reduce overgrazing still further. The National Park was created in 1987, when the area became uninhabited. The same year saw the start of a programme of protective burning to reduce wildfire and create mosaics of vegetation. By the mid-nineties, tourism had become a local feature, despite the difficulties of access, with ground-based visitors numbering ca 20,000 p.a. and perhaps the same number overflying the Park each year.

In spite of more than a 100 years of outside intervention, and the resulting severe changes in the landscape and in social structures, it is claimed in the nomination that Aboriginal people who live near Purnululu still retain communal memories of traditional land management practices, and of *Ngarrangkarni* associations, and still use the landscape for harvesting wild food and for social gatherings.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The Park and Reserve are owned by the Government of Western Australia.

Amendments to the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 are currently under negotiation to allow the Park and Reserve to be vested with a Prescribed Body Corporate to hold native title on behalf of traditional owners. They are 'the registered Native Title claimants under the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993 of an area that includes the area proposed for nomination'. Two different groups of 'traditional owners' have claimed this land.

Technically, all traditional owners have recently lost their legal claim to the land in a court case. Nevertheless, they aspire to joint management of the Park and the transfer of its ownership to them.

Since the nomination was submitted, and pending the completion of legislative changes, a Deed of Agreement between the Department of the Environment and Heritage and the Purnululu Corporation has been signed. This document allows for the formation of a Purnululu Park Council to provide 'meaningful input for the traditional Aboriginal custodians in relation to the park'.

It is envisaged in the nomination that, in the future, the Dept. of Conservation and Land Management would manage the property on behalf of this Purnululu Park Council, a body made up of traditional owners and the Department. Until the Council is set up, it is not clear what proportion of the eight members of the Council will be Aboriginal traditional owners, how they will be involved proactively in the management of the Park, or whether new settlements will be set up in the Park - although this was envisaged in the nomination.

The Middle Ord Region is in the Australian Heritage Commission's Register of the National Estate. The National Park was created in 1987 and upgraded to class A in 1988. If inscribed, the Park would be additionally protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act) 1999, which covers World Heritage properties in Australia. It requires

that a management plan be prepared and implemented, consistent with the World Heritage Convention and the Australian World Heritage Management Principles.

Management structure:

The Park and Reserve are managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Western Australia.

The National Park Management Plan 1995-2005, currently under review, sets out seven specific goals. Cultural considerations come into three of them.

Overall, the Plan was clearly a good one for the National Park at the time of its compilation. It could now be said to be light in its treatment of the management of cultural values and in particular in the integration of traditional owners and their traditional practices into the forefront of management of the Park.

It is understood that the Plan is currently under review and will when completed, embrace both cultural resources of the past and current cultural change and its implications. The nomination dossier states that 'Where issues arise in relation to culturally sensitive areas, those issues are given high priority by ... management.'

Surveys: The nomination says some surveys have been carried out but implies that monitoring is still to be put in place. Supplementary information provided by the State Party in September 2002, provides much enlarged information on the state of surveys and knowledge of the nominated area in terms of cultural processes. Lists of archaeological sites, sites on surface finds and rock shelters are listed in the document. Although a few *Ngarrangkarni* sites are listed, no methodology is suggested for recording the intangible links between peoples and the landscape. Nor is there mention made of the involvement of oral historians or ethnographers to begin compiling data on the crucially important relationship between Aboriginal traditional owners and the landscape, so that there can be an understanding as to how to monitor this fragile intangible heritage.

Traditional owners: A key aspect of this nomination and of management of the area is the role of traditional owners. Many aspects of their culture, history and aspirations are discussed but two fundamental matters seem to be treated with some ambiguity.

Neither the nomination nor its supporting documents state how many people are embraced by the term 'traditional owners'. The impression given is that they are no more than a few dozen. The size of the population is clearly crucial to the viability and sustainability of the landscape as a living cultural landscape. This points needs clarification.

Nor does the nomination say where these traditional owners now live. The nomination infers that the Park is uninhabited and that the local people were moved out at the creation of the Park in 1987. It is stated that traditional owners hope to establish new settlements in the park, but no details as to how this process will be managed are given, although it is understood that the process will be part of the advice given by the Purnululu Park Council, once it is established.

It would have been helpful if this significant matter could have been addressed more clearly – at least in terms of

aspirations. If Purnululu is to be sustained as a living landscape, then the relationship between traditional owners and that landscape is fundamental and ideally should be based on a close physical inter-dependence.

Resources:

The Park is funded on a ratio of 5:9 by public funds and revenue it raises itself, to a total of 324620 \$ p.a. Much of current income comes from landing fees.

Considerable increases are in mind to upgrade management in the event of inscription. The Park staff consists of two permanent rangers and a seasonal visitor centre manager.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

Aboriginal people have lived in the East Kimberley Region for at least the last 20,000 years. The Park provides exceptional testimony to this hunter-gatherer cultural tradition, particularly its riverine features... Fire has been, and continues to be, an important tool in Aboriginal management of this environment.

Ngarrangkarni (popularly the 'Dreaming' or the 'Law'), handed down through countless generations, continues to be the guiding principle in the living traditions and beliefs of Purnululu's traditional owners.

The cultural landscape is significant because its people and traditions have survived despite the impact of colonisation, showing a resilience at a time when such cultures everywhere have become vulnerable.

If included on the World Heritage List, Purnululu will enhance its comprehensiveness and complement other Australian World Heritage properties, especially Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Kakadu National Parks.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

A joint IUCN/ICOMOS mission visited the property in August 2002.

Conservation

Conservation history:

Managed sustainably by traditional owners for tens of thousands of years, the nominated area became subject to moderate to severe degradation, including erosion, from the 1880s onwards as a result of mineral and agricultural exploitation, notably cattle-grazing. The effects of this phase are still present, both in the landscape and among the traditional landowners.

1987 the National Park was created. In 1995 the *Management Plan 1995-2005* was exceptionally framed, as distinct from other National Parks, 'to ensure the involvement of the Aboriginal traditional custodians in the ongoing management of the Park' (Preface, p. i).

State of conservation:

The nomination says that ‘the present state... is a result of the historic pressures of pastoralism and overgrazing and the current pressures of tourism’. On the other hand elsewhere in then nomination it is implied that the cultural landscape sustained by the Aboriginal people is still visible. Perhaps it would be truer to say that cultural landscape still exists as the perceived link between people and the landscape even though few or no people live in the area and much change has been inflicted over the past one hundred years or so.

‘The current pressures of tourism affecting the present conservation of the property are focussed on the friable sandstone gorges, not the more resilient black soil plains, sand plains and grasslands affected historically by cattle.’ Basic steps like hardening paths and distributing camping grounds are mitigating tourism impacts and have probably stabilised the situation.

Risk analysis:

The following risks have been identified:

- Natural disasters
- Visitor pressure
- Lack of occupants*
- Loss of traditional knowledge*
- Mining*

[* These are not detailed in the nomination]

These are dealt with in turn:

Natural disasters: Fire, floods and other disasters have been addressed by the production of emergency action plans.

Visitor pressure: The current campsites approach full capacity at times. ‘...tourism has the potential to affect values.’ Although numbers of visitors are low compared to many other World Heritage sites, the fragility of the area makes it extremely sensitive to them. One policy is to promote aerial access for day visitors, to contain the demand for overnight stays and consequential infrastructural developments; but increasing air traffic may increasingly impair ‘the feeling of wilderness experienced by many visitors’ and create an aural threat.

It may be necessary to limit visitor numbers at peak times. Meanwhile, to constrain visitor numbers and retain the wilderness nature of the Park, it is policy to maintain land access by unpaved roads suitable for 4-wheel drive vehicles. Pressure to upgrade the road for normal vehicles is, however, constant. Internal roads and some tracks may also need to be upgraded. This issue will be addressed in the review for the current Park plan in 2005.

High pressure from visitors on footpaths is leading to some degradation of paths. Upgrading is likely to take place. Visitor facilities are also expected to be upgraded to meet visitor’s rising expectations.

Lack of occupants: Although not specifically listed in the nomination as a threat, clearly any diminution in the number of people who consider themselves to be traditional owners of the area, to such a level as to make the traditional management of the park unviable, would be

a serious threat. It is not yet clear how the numbers of people associated with the park will be sustained – but clearly this is part of the on-going negotiations with traditional owners, and the final form of agreement has yet to be determined.

Loss of traditional knowledge: This theme likewise was not highlighted as a threat. Nevertheless the integrity of the cultural landscape as a living landscape would be severely compromised if the local owners were no longer the oral custodians of traditional knowledge.

Mining: This threat was not articulated in the nomination. In response to an enquiry into whether or not existing controls over mining will be sufficient to protect cultural and natural qualities, Environment Australia has said that the EPBC Act provides protection for ‘World Heritage Values’ that are contained in the property and in conjunction with the Mining Act 1978 will provide sufficient protection.

Authenticity and integrity

The present state of the landscape in Purnululu raises issues connected with authenticity and integrity. The nomination acknowledges that the landscape has suffered from the results of mining and of agricultural over-exploitation by settlers. Thus the physical landscape overall as it stands cannot be considered to be entirely authentic in connection with the cultural qualities put forward as contributing to its overall significance. Rather what the nomination is suggesting is that the inherent qualities of the landscape are discernable and are capable of restoration to a condition approaching that which pertained before the arrival of settlers, through the re-introduction of traditional land-use practices. One such example is the implementation of an appropriate fire regime based on traditional Aboriginal fire management combined with the use of traditional knowledge and skills, to further ecosystem recovery of the sand and black soil plains.

On the other hand many of the intangible qualities associated with the landscape, such as the practice of *ngarrankarni* and knowledge of ethno botany, are still relatively intact – albeit attenuated through the movement of traditional owners to the outside of the park.

The practice of hunting and gathering has also diminished through the extended distances between where people live and the park, although it is understood that agreement is to be negotiated on acceptable levels of extraction of natural resources in the future.

Similarly the fact that the park is no longer lived in diminishes its cultural qualities. However it seems to be the stated intention to encourage new settlement in the park, once a satisfactory regime of partnership management has been put in place.

Overall, the dynamic relationship between the aboriginal owners and the park is still there but operating at a much less intense level than previously. If this relationship is to be strengthened in the future, in order to reinforce the authenticity of the area, then proactive cultural management will be needed to ensure that the owners do

not become park keepers or that traditional knowledge becomes atrophied.

Comparative evaluation

Of 730 World Heritage sites, only 3 represent hunter-gather societies, at Kakadu, Uluru (both in Australia) and Tongariro (New Zealand). Given the hundreds of thousands of years in which hunter-gathering was the only way of life for humanity, the sparsity of its representation of the World Heritage List could be said to reflect poorly on the credibility of that List. In evaluating surviving sites, then clearly scarcity or rarity are factors. However it cannot be argued that all surviving hunter-gather sites, because of their scarcity, are of universal value.

Most surviving hunter-gatherer societies are in Australia, 'the last continent populated by hunter-gatherers to experience and survive colonisation'. The evaluation of such sites is therefore mainly focused within one country.

Already two sites are inscribed within Australia. How is Purnululu culturally differentiated from the existing World Heritage sites?

The ICOMOS 1994 evaluation of Uluru 'noted several major differences between [Uluru and Kakadu] regions ... they exemplify cultural adaptations to opposite poles of an ecological continuum. [Purnululu] originates in a related cultural tradition but represents an adaptation to an intermediate point on this ecological continuum. Different to the cultures of the tropics and the desert, Purnululu uniquely represents thousands of years of hunter-gatherer adaptation to a riverine and upland ecosystem.'

The geographical difference is also manifest in cultural manifestations. The Purnululu *Ngarrangkarni* is similar in philosophy and concept to the *tjukurpa* of Uluru but it is 'different in form and vision, with a different ecological and cultural well-spring. The differences are manifest in the very different artistic representations ...'.

Purnululu can therefore be considered a prime example of hunter-gathering societies whose cultural traits reflect geographical traits intermediate between the tropics and the desert within Australia.

Further afield in, for instance, North America, central Borneo, the Philippines, hunter-gather peoples tend to live in well-watered areas. While closer parallels may exist unnoted, there do not seem to be direct analogues for the hunter-gatherers of the Purnululu region outside Australia.

On grounds of rarity, this property would seem to have an a priori case for inscription both in itself and on comparative grounds in general. On grounds of overall significance, in comparison with other hunter-gather sites, Purnululu is seen as being a unique cultural response to a local environment.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

The Purnululu National Park is of significance for the way it testifies to the traditions of a hunter-gatherer society which still exists and whose way of life has a very long time-depth.

There is evidence that Aboriginal people have lived in the East Kimberley Region of Purnululu for at least 20,000 years. Their descendents still live near the park and are strongly associated with the landscape through traditions of extracting wild produce and through their indigenous religious philosophy, *Ngarrangkarni*, which invests the landscape with ancestral associations, and layers of meaning. Material testimony to this long tradition is found in hundreds of archaeological sites, including rock art sites, scattered across the park.

Purnululu is also of significance for the resilience its traditional owners have shown in the face of adverse impacts of colonisation.

Overall Purnululu is of outstanding universal value as one of the few remaining areas of the world where hunter-gathering lifestyles still persist and for its unique cultural response to the particular geophysical characteristics of the area.

Evaluation of criteria:

Purnululu is nominated under **criteria iii, v and vi:**

Criterion iii: Purnululu clearly bears an exceptional testimony to a unique cultural tradition, if one considers the area not just as a reflection of the hunting and gathering way of life, but a particular (unique) cultural manifestation of that, related to the geography and climate of the area. In an area transitional between the arid interior of the continent and the wetter north, the cultural traditions show how people 'adapt to areas of significant environmental diversity', in this case a riverine culture with beliefs linking it 'to the time when the features of the landscape were first formed.

Criterion v: It is doubtful if the Purnululu area still exhibits a traditional human settlement or land use in its entirety, but continuance of cultural traditions, related to land-use is exhibited. In addition, the post-1920 Aboriginal experience under pastoralism is an important element of the nomination in that it demonstrates the effects of irreversible change, the responses generated, and the persistence of local traditions.

Criterion vi: Purnululu is directly and tangibly associated with the living religious traditions and beliefs of *Ngarrangkarni*, an outstanding example of indigenous Australian belief system, indissolubly at the core of the Aboriginal way of life.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

The nomination raises a number of key issues in relation to defining and sustaining cultural landscapes.

The nomination is put forward as a living cultural landscape, associated with hunting and gathering traditions and one that has an enormous time depth. It is however acknowledged that there has been a severe dislocation of the local processes – caused by the arrival of European settlers in the 1880s and the subsequent exploitation of the natural resources through cattle ranching. It moreover appears to be the case that the park is no longer lived in, with the remaining indigenous Aboriginal communities

living – apparently although this is not made clear – around the edges of the park.

Although the long negotiations over land rights at Purnululu have only recently come to a legal conclusion, it is the stated intention to integrate local people into the management of the park. How this will be achieved is still being debated but the signing of an agreement to set up a Purnululu Park Council is a significant step forward.

What is not clear however is whether the aim is to re-establish settlements in the park to allow traditional practices over a wide areas of the park to be re-established, or whether the spirit of a hunting and gathering economy is to kept going through ceremonial and social associations with the area, rather than economic ones. Either way a certain number of people will be needed in order to reach a sustainable system, which has a tangible impact on the ecology of the area. There is no discussion in the papers as to how this capacity will be evaluated or managed.

The second issue is connected with several of the key cultural qualities of the area. Many of the cultural qualities associated with Purnululu are intangible qualities. While those qualities can be understood and evaluated by outsiders (indeed that is what the nomination seeks to do), the qualities are entirely related to Aboriginal traditional knowledge, very little of which it seems has been recorded. How to sustain this knowledge and how to monitor success or otherwise with this process are not addressed in detail.

It would have been helpful to have had the need for the recording of oral history and sociological research noted. It would also seem to be the case that documenting the complex relationship between Purnululu and its indigenous inhabitants calls for innovative approaches and possibly innovative technologies. Aspirational aims connected to these issues would have helped to indicate commitment to a way forward.

Both these points will need to be addressed in the forthcoming review of the Management Plan, which overall will need to address the management of the property as a World Heritage site as well as a National Park and bring out much more strongly cultural issues. The nomination raises the interesting issue as to how to map a landscape valued largely for its intangible associations. The nomination says that the boundary (of the National Park which coincides with the nominated area) is ‘difficult to define on the ground or to manage’ (*Management Plan*, p. 5).

As the intangible qualities of Purnululu are closely linked to its natural qualities, it would be desirable to map associations and evaluate the most acceptable boundary in the light of the density of associations across the park. The World Heritage site may not in all instances coincide with the national park. Just over half of the length of the boundary of the nominated area does not have a Buffer Zone. In response to enquiries on this issue, Environment Australia have indicated that the EPBC Act provides protection not only within World Heritage areas but also ‘outside a World Heritage property’ and thus ‘obviates the need to establish formal buffer zones around... each of Australia’s World Heritage properties’. However it could be that part of the national park area could provide a Buffer Zone if the nominated area is seen to be smaller than the national park.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the nomination be *deferred* in order to allow the State Party to provide:

- An updated Management Plan;
- Clearer arrangements for the governance of the nominated site, particularly in relation to sustaining traditional Aboriginal communities in the Park;
- An approach to ways of sustaining intangible qualities;
- An appraisal of approaches to ethnographic, sociological and oral recording of intangible and tangible cultural traditions.

In assessing this nomination, ICOMOS has formed the view that the cultural and natural qualities of the site are so intrinsically linked as to be inseparable. It hence advises that, in order to recognise and sustain the complex interaction between the natural and cultural values of the site, consideration should be given to inscribing Purnululu only as a mixed site.

ICOMOS, March 2003