

# Executive Summary

## State Party

Australia.

## State, Province or Region

Western Australia.

## Name of nominated property

Murujuga Cultural Landscape.

## Geographical coordinates to the nearest second

The geographical coordinates near the centre of the nominated property are:

20° 33' 54" S

116° 40' 6" E

## Textual description of the boundary of the nominated property

This contiguous nominated property is comprised of 99,881 hectares in the north-west coast of Western Australia, including 8356 hectares of the Burrup Peninsula, 42 islands of the Dampier Archipelago and adjacent marine areas. The area generally consists of:

- Murujuga National Park
- Dampier Archipelago conservation estate
- Western Australian unallocated Crown land and other Crown reserves
- Local government land
- Dampier Archipelago waters
- Port lands and waters
- Industrial leased land
- Department of Defence leased land

## Map of the nominated property, showing boundary

Map E.S.1. Murujuga Cultural Landscape nominated property boundary.

## Criteria under which property is nominated

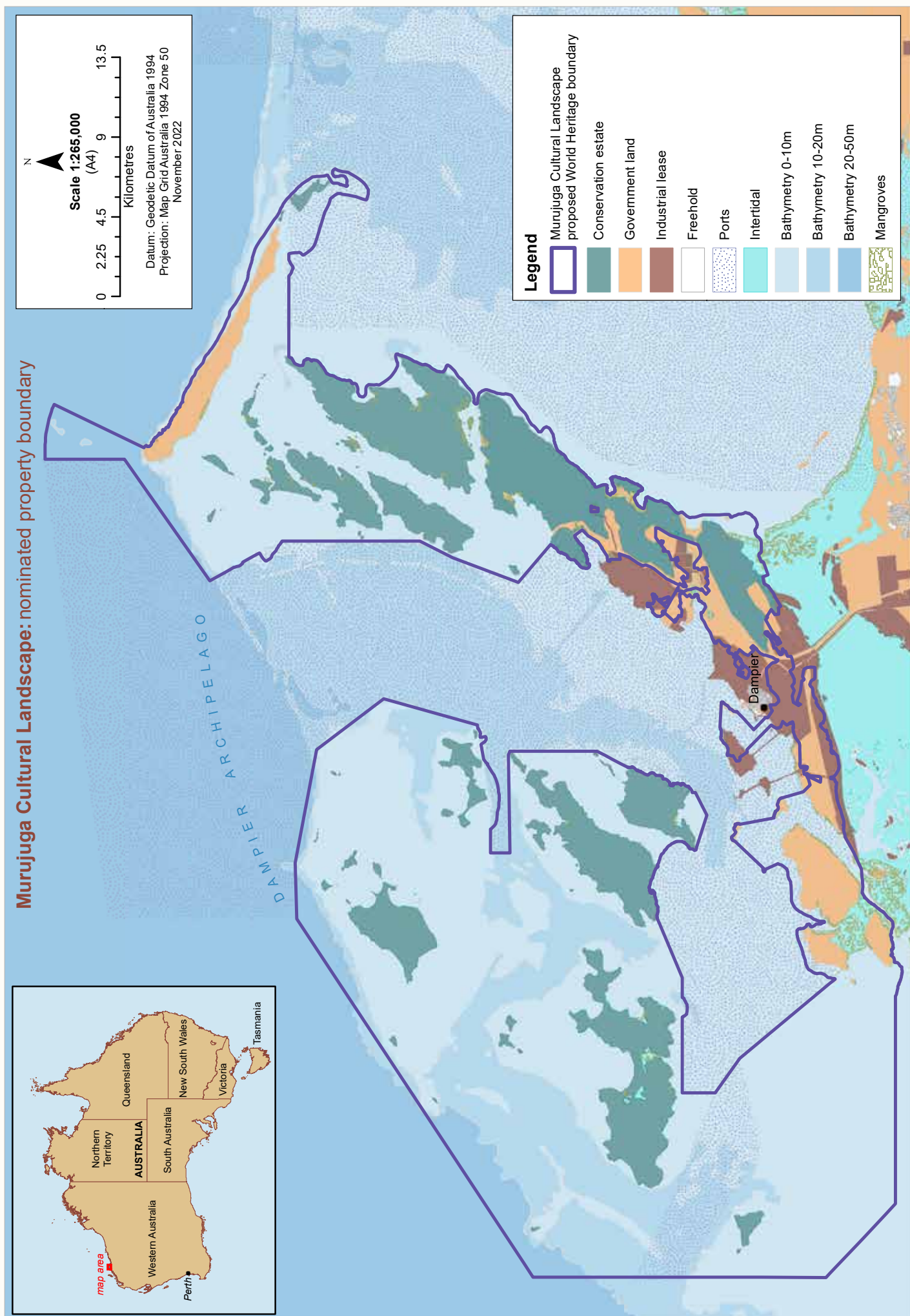
**Criterion (i)** Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.

**Criterion (iii)** Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.

**Criterion (v)** An outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land or sea use which is representative of a culture, or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.

## Cultural landscape

Yes.



**Map E.S.1** Murujuga Cultural Landscape: nominated property boundary.

## Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

### Brief synthesis

Murujuga, meaning ‘hip bone sticking out’, is a landscape of ancient rocks that rises out of the Indian Ocean in northwest Australia. The rocky gullies and hills of Murujuga are shaped by the Lore and the presence of Ngarda-Ngarli, the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this landscape, since Ngurra Nyujunggamu, when the earth was soft, the beginning of time. The **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** is inscribed with creative artworks, stories and spiritual significance, capturing its living cultural values. The potential Outstanding Universal Value of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** is expressed through unified tangible and intangible attributes that attest to at least 50,000 years of Ngarda-Ngarli using and caring for the land and seascape.

The petroglyph assemblage at Murujuga is extensive, diverse, and includes motifs of artistic originality, where innovative techniques convey movement and technical skill employed to achieve textured effects. The deliberate placement of motifs at significant sites within the landscape has great aesthetic impact. The Murujuga assemblage is the most vast and densest known concentrations of petroglyphs in the world. The petroglyphs incorporate visual representations of cultural practices and record history through times of significant climatic and environmental change.

The cultural landscape includes evidence of occupation which, in combination with the petroglyphs, stone structures and living cultural practices, demonstrate adaptive human use of land and sea. The continuity of rich cultural connections is evident in the people, beliefs, and **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** since deep time. These attributes are intrinsically holistic and it is only through their unified consideration that the full narrative of the cultural landscape is understood. This is a living cultural landscape that is testament to cultural traditions, creativity, spirituality and ecological knowledge spanning tens of thousands of years.

### Justification for inscription

#### Criterion (i):

The petroglyphs of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** demonstrate artistic achievement assembled over 50,000 years. The creative genius of Ngarda-Ngarli ancestors is evidenced in artistic quality, placement within the landscape, and the overwhelming visual quality of the entire ensemble of 1-2 million petroglyphs.

The artistic quality is remarkable. There is diversity in artistic expression, including use of naturalism and abstraction. While some anthropomorphic figures are arranged in complex scenes, others are engraved in distinctive styles as individual motifs. There are abstract static figures; unusual profile figures; as well as standing, running, and squatting figures, some with sinuous limbs, where artists have used profile and perspective to create a sense of movement. Many zoomorphic petroglyphs demonstrate detailed naturalism revealing morphological knowledge of locally and nationally extinct marsupials. Animal footprints denote spiritual paths through the landscape, and the corpus also includes geometric and abstract designs. The collection of rare and intricate archaic faces, thought to be some of the oldest Murujuga petroglyphs, are amongst the earliest anthropomorphic images on earth. These motifs were produced using complex decorative infill and would have required exceptionally skilled engraving techniques.

The petroglyphs are visually outstanding, demonstrate technical skill, and represent multiple phases in the development of regional and local styles. The petroglyphs exist in deliberate spatial relations, established by deep cultural connections between people and landscape. Their placement and content convey an encyclopedia of cultural knowledge. The Murujuga petroglyphs are a manifestation of creative genius, inscribed in the landscape since deep time.

### Criterion (iii):

The **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** bears testimony to the living cultural traditions of Ngarda-Ngarli and the spiritual relationship between people and landscape that is at least 50,000 years old. Ngarda-Ngarli knowledge, Lore, Law, and culture are expressed through the landscape and in the rock art assemblage.

The rock art of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** has a central role in the continuing culture of Ngarda-Ngarli through storytelling that connects Country with creation stories. New generations learn cultural traditions through the observance of Law, artistic practices like song and dance, as well as the performance of particular actions at places of spiritual power within the landscape. Ngarda-Ngarli fulfill cultural obligations to look after the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** and there are possible harmful effects if responsibilities are neglected.

The petroglyphs, stone structures and Ngarda-Ngarli's cultural beliefs all provide testimony to a living cultural tradition. Petroglyphs are a permanent reminder that Traditional Lore is inscribed into the landscape. Stone structures and archaeological sites are a permanent inscription within the landscape of the practice of Law, the social division of space and adaptive strategies of stewardship within a dynamic environment. The creation narratives, jinna ('songlines'), spiritual places, and thalu (increase sites) are fundamental to Ngarda-Ngarli understanding and management of nature. The natural attributes are a reminder of continuing traditional management of the land and seascape over thousands of generations. The stories, the resources and spirit of the land are alive and as important to Ngarda-Ngarli today as they have been for at least 50,000 years.

### Criterion (v):

The **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** exemplifies the combined works of nature and humankind. The relationship between Ngarda-Ngarli and the landscape is evident in the petroglyphs, archaeological record and, importantly, contemporary knowledge and culture. Material evidence and Ngarda-Ngarli living culture attest to continued use of the landscape over millennia, including periods of significant environmental and climatic change.

The landscape reveals a creation narrative of climatic change, culminating in rapid sea level rises that shifted the coastline approximately 160 kilometres, so the arid rocky ranges became an archipelago. The petroglyphs of Murujuga provide a detailed record of the ecological transition, illustrating traditional ecological knowledge. Ngarda-Ngarli witnessed and adapted to change, modifying rituals and the landscape, including middens, quarries, standing stones and fish traps. The landscape includes Australia's earliest known domestic stone structures, as well as submerged occupation sites. Ngarda Ngarli continue to sing jinna connecting the land and seascape.

The **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** is an outstanding example of human interaction with the environment over at least 50,000 years. The landscape is patterned by this long-term presence persisting through irreversible environmental and climatic changes. The cultural landscape includes petroglyphs, stone structures and living cultural practices, which evidence adaptive utilisation of land and sea and continuous Ngarda-Ngarli custodianship of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** since deep time.

## Statement of Integrity

The **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** is an intact and demonstrative example of human creativity, spiritual associations and continuous human interaction with a dynamic land and seascape. The integrity is sustained through Ngarda-Ngarli cultural practices and active management.

All attributes that convey potential Outstanding Universal Value are within the proposed boundary of the nominated property and in a good state of conservation. Tangible attributes are whole and intact, and intangible cultural associations remain strong. Based on surveys, assessment and consultation, the boundary has been designated to exclude deteriorated lands and the nominated property conveys all the values of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape**.



The attributes of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** include a vast petroglyph corpus; stone structures; archaeological sites; sites of spiritual and cultural significance; as well as sites demonstrating a continuation of land and sea use spanning millennia. Significant features are in good condition and impacts of deterioration processes are controlled through monitoring and management. Relationships are maintained through continuing traditional custodianship of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape**. The resilience and persistence of Ngarda-Ngarli in advocating for heritage protections and ensuring continuity of traditional practices, despite colonisation, mean that the intangible heritage values of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** are intact and continuing.

## Statement of Authenticity

The potential Outstanding Universal Value of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** is truthfully and credibly expressed in petroglyphs, stone structures, and living cultural practices of Ngarda-Ngarli. Authenticity here encompasses truth in the design and substance of the petroglyphs and the credibility of the cultural traditions. The authenticity reflects Ngarda-Ngarli cultural understandings and ontologies, extending back through all recorded time.

The connection between people and landscape is inscribed into the landforms, as artworks carved and etched into the rocks and stone structures created for a range of traditional uses. The **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** has evolved over at least 50,000 years of human occupation, and the attributes convey an authentic sense of place reflecting the continuing and dynamic presence of Ngarda-Ngarli.

Creative genius is credibly and truthfully expressed in the petroglyphs, demonstrating originality in technique, form and design. Continuing cultural traditions coherently accord with knowledge conveyed by the petroglyphs. Motifs relate to traditional community identity, relationships, and responsibilities. Lore and Law define knowledge and responsibility through prescribed rules that govern economic, cultural, social and ceremonial interactions. Ngarda-Ngarli work to ensure intergenerational transmission of language, traditional knowledge and continuity in caring for the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape**.

## Requirements for protection and management

Protection of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** is guided by Ngarda-Ngarli. Ngarda Ngarli protocols for protecting the landscape through customary governance are practiced alongside contemporary management techniques. The joint managers of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** are the Murujuga Land and Sea Unit, managed by Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, and the Western Australian Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

The potential Outstanding Universal Value is protected through the care, control and management of Ngarda-Ngarli, who are supported by a comprehensive legislative framework. Ngarda-Ngarli have authority under both traditional 'Lore' and Australian 'Law'. Traditional knowledge guides management and Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation's consent is sought prior to development within and outside of the proposed property. Protection and management of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** includes working with managers of adjacent lands to monitor and manage impacts of existing development. The *Murujuga Rock Art Strategy* establishes the long-term framework to protect Murujuga's petroglyphs from the impacts of industrial emissions.

If included on the World Heritage List, the World Heritage values of the property will be recognised as a 'Matter of National Environmental Significance' under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. A majority of the land area of the nominated property is also protected through Australia's National Heritage List. Cultural heritage within the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape** is further protected by the *Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* and the *Western Australian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021*.

## Executive Summary

*The Murujuga Cultural Landscape Strategic Management Framework* synthesises and consolidates management arrangements for the nominated property, comprising Australian and Western Australian legislation, joint management agreements, statutory management plans and complementary policies, strategies and programs. *The Murujuga Cultural Landscape Strategic Management Framework* has been adopted by the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, the Western Australian Government and the Australian Government.

In support of Ngarda-Ngarli customary management, there is a deep level of commitment to the management of the nominated property from the Australian, Western Australian and local governments, and non-government stakeholders, to protect, present and transmit the values of the **Murujuga Cultural Landscape**.

### Name and contact information of official local institutional agency

**Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water**

GPO Box 787

Canberra ACT 2601

Australia

Tel: 61 2 6274 1111

Email: [Heritage@dcceew.gov.au](mailto:Heritage@dcceew.gov.au)

Web address: [www.dcceew.gov.au](http://www.dcceew.gov.au)