

AUSTRALIA

Willandra Lakes Region

II.1 Introduction

Year of Inscription 1981

Organisation Responsible for the Report

- Environment Australia,
New South Wales National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)
Willandra Lakes Region WHA, Lower Darling Area,
New South Wales
Australia

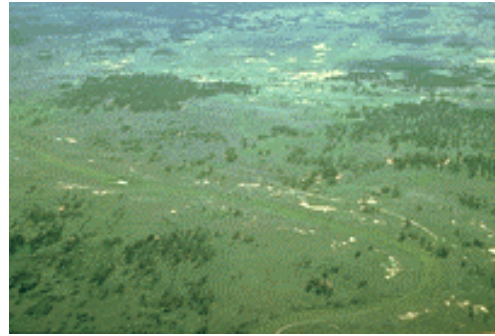
II.2 Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria N i, C iii

Statement of Significance

- Proposed as follows:
“An aesthetic sense, ritual and concern for deceased are surely the hallmarks of mankind. The Willandra discoveries have established the great antiquity and richness of Aboriginal culture and have caused a significant reassessment of Aboriginal prehistory and its place in the history of modern man.”
The outstanding universal value of the property derives from: skeletal remains amongst the earliest evidence of *Homo Sapiens* anywhere in the world; evidence of complex ritual & symbolic systems in the form of an ochred burial & a cremation now believed to be 40-42,000 years old uncovered near Lake Mungo; ancient grindstones to produce flour from wild grass seeds; and archaeological evidence of remarkable early human technological adaptation to the natural environment.
In terms of natural heritage, the outstanding universal value includes: a regional Quaternary fossil landscape; a resource for research into palaeoclimatic, semi-arid environments & late Pleistocene paleo-magnetism; and one of the largest clay dunes in the world, the Chibnalwood lunette.
- An indicative table of WH attributes is attached.

“With regard to the integrity of the region, it is an irony of the Willandra Lakes that continued erosion of key geomorphological features results in the exposure of cultural sites that further reinforce the reason for the listing.”



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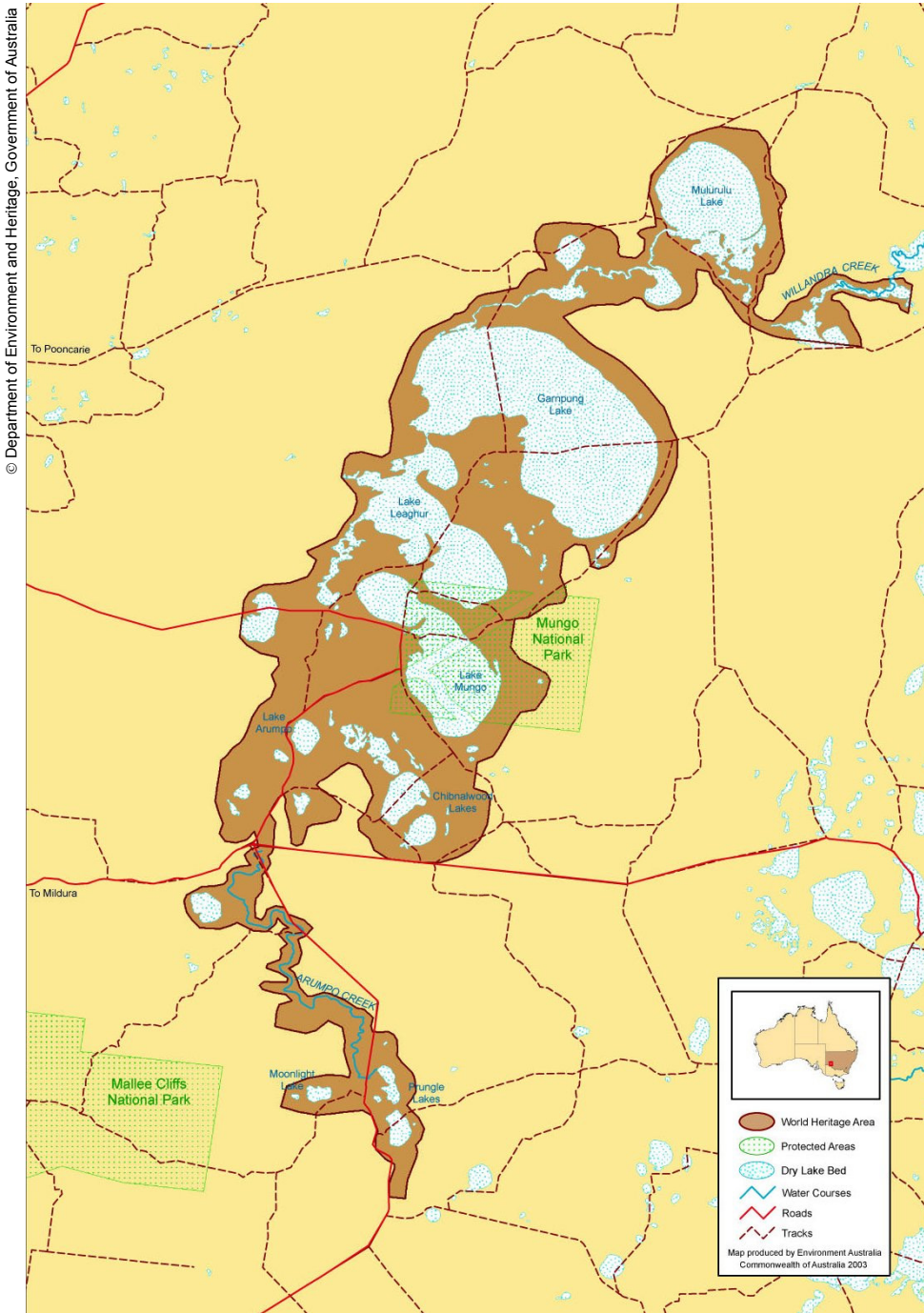
Status of Site Boundaries

- “At the time of listing, the boundary of the WLR was defined by cadastral boundaries which included pastoral leases and crown reserves.” Although a “convenient reference”, these borders did not accurately reflect the WH landscape.
- In 1995, the WH Committee endorsed Australia’s revised boundary which removed certain pastoral leases and reduced the size of the property to under 240,000 ha. A few excluded areas were also included with the support of scientists, landholders & the 3 affiliated Aboriginal groups.
- As part of a “structural readjustment package” and to develop a management plan for WLR, several pastoral leases were purchased in October 2002 and added to the conservation estate (Mungo National Park), which now amounts to 25% of the WH area, an increase from 10% in 1981.
- There are no formal buffer zones. However, any proposed development in the vicinity of the WH boundary is formally assessed & scrutinised by the WLR WH management committees.

II.3 Statement of Authenticity/Integrity

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- “As overall, or general measures of condition, the authenticity and integrity of the WLR remain intact (...) The only change has been continued deflation and erosion of that which was already eroded at the time of listing.”
- “With regard to the integrity of the region, it is an irony of the Willandra Lakes that continued erosion of key geomorphological features results in the exposure of cultural sites that further reinforce the reason for the listing.”



Map of the Willandra Lakes region showing WH Area (in brown)

Conservation rangeland monitoring; (iv) NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979).

- Referrals under the national EPBC Act 1999 have been few “by virtue of the WLR being in a remote area and not subject to high development pressure”, and have related mainly to sand mining projects located outside the WH boundary.
- 3 management committees (with cross-representation of some members) are responsible for providing advice to Governments on management of the WLR: (i) three traditional tribal groups ‘Elders Councils’; (ii) a ‘Community Management Council’ of local stakeholders; and (iii) a ‘Technical & Scientific Advisory Committee’.
- A ‘Steering Committee’ of executive level Government officers coordinates inter-departmental policy on the WH area.

Present State of Conservation

- Mining for mineral sands has occurred in a number of locations, especially at Garpung & Prungle Stations outside of the WH area

boundaries. “Detailed environmental assessment of these locations are in progress.”

II.4 Management

Administrative and Management Arrangements

- Local authorities play a minor role in management committees and in-kind contributions to projects.
- State-level legislative controls include the: (i) Gazetted WLR ‘Regional Environmental Plan’ which identifies WLR WH management committees, including the tribal elders council, with decision-making responsibility; (ii) NSW National Parks & Wildlife Act (1974); (iii) NSW Dept. of Land & Water

Staffing and Training Needs

- “The WLR WHA has one dedicated staff member (the Executive Officer) located in the region.” The officer is funded by the Commonwealth and supported by staff from NSW NPWS & Environment Australia.
- Training is provided by NSW NPWS on an “as needs basis”.

Financial Situation

- Funds for WH management projects have been mainly grants from the Commonwealth 'Natural Heritage Trust' since 1996. No figures supplied.
- Funding is considered adequate. However, the delivery of annual "project-based" grants rather than recurrent funding allocations has made on-going site monitoring problematic.
- The State of NSW has "no specific budget for WH management". Such a budget "would be of great assistance in preparing joint Commonwealth/State funding submissions."
- * International Assistance from WHF: none.

Access to IT

- Computer resources running on IBM Windows NT & supported by an NPWS Intranet are adequate.

Visitor Management

- In 2001, NPWS estimates that about 40,000 people visited Mungo National Park with significant peaks during school holidays & winter months. A small tourist lodge has been established outside the western boundary.
- Limited interpretive facilities include: (i) a self-guided visitor centre at Mungo NP; (ii) new signage at WH boundaries (acknowledging traditional owners); and (iii) a guidebook, website & interactive CD-Rom.
- Improvements in interpretive materials will be completed by June 2003 with new brochures, maps, & audio-visual "touch-screen" computers.

II.5 Factors Affecting the Property

Threats and Risks

- Mining for mineral sands requiring large volumes of water,
- Combined grazing pressure of feral & native grazers,
- Deflation of ground surfaces in eroded areas,
- Erosive effects of foot traffic by visitors.

Counteractive Plans

- The rabbit population has declined following the introduction of the Rabbit Calici Virus (RCV).
- Midgley et al (1998) study on visitor impacts.
- The 'Walls of China' visitor car park has been relocated & additional boardwalks are planned.

II.6 Monitoring

Monitoring Arrangements

- The rangeland monitoring of the NSW Dept. of Land & Water Conservation "is not specifically targeted towards WH values, but rather to general landscape conservation" concerning overstocking/grazing.

- While the 1996 Plan of Management 'Sustaining the Willandra' accorded high priority to site rehabilitation, systematic recording of site condition data was only initiated in 2002 with the selection of 10 locations for detailed monitoring defined as the "repeated gathering of specified information".

Monitoring Indicators

- NPWS have collated data on visitor numbers since 1981 through road & pedestrian counters (an average of 3.3 people per vehicle is used), vehicle surveys, and analysis of visitor book signatures.
- In 1995, 23 points were identified to measure the rate of erosion near burial locations.
- Monitoring indicators established prior to 2002 include: (i) rangeland assessment plots (RAPs) at 11 locations; (ii) transects & photo points to monitor vegetation change; (iii) autumn studies of Kangaroo populations.
- The following draft list of key indicators has been identified for the Willandra Region: (i) integrity of geomorphological and fluvial features; (ii) retention of both known and as yet undiscovered evidence of giant extinct marsupial species, except for authorised removals; (iii) integrity and state of preservation of archaeological sites; (iv) retention of archaeological materials *in situ*, except where removal is authorized.

II.7 Conclusions and Recommended Actions

Conclusions and Proposed Actions

- "The ability to assess and control peripheral actions" which might have a detrimental effect on the property has been reinforced by the EPBC Act 1999.
- "The traditional owners of the region are only now beginning to achieve a meaningful role in the management of the WH area... This issue will be a priority area of the Plan of Management that is currently being prepared."
- As a result of monitoring indicators, "landholders are provided with annual reports and advice on management", including 'Individual Property Plans'. It is also proposed to submit Balmoral Station as a State Conservation Area.
- The need for a State Budget for WH management is "particularly the case for NSW" which has the responsibility for 4 separate WH properties.
- "An ongoing/recurrent budget for site monitoring and management is a major requirement."

* State of Conservation Reports

1994 WHC-CONF.001/3b As no one from IUCN, ICOMOS or UNESCO had ever paid a visit to this mixed site, IUCN requested the Australian authorities to arrange a field visit to examine reported problems with resident landowners, aboriginal concerns, and the lack of a management plan 13 years after it was requested by the Committee. The 2-day visit concluded that Willandra was the most neglected of all Australia's WH sites. A full briefing document was later provided to IUCN on the activities underway including the establishment of a Community Management Council; a Technical & Scientific Advisory Committee; the release of a 'Strategic Issues Document'; and a socio-economic impact study funded by the Commonwealth to assist the State of New South Wales.

1995 WHC-CONF.203/5 The Bureau took note of the first mission report to the site. In a letter dated September 1995, the national authorities advised WHC of a proposed amendment to the boundary of Willandra Lakes. In consultation with scientists, landholders & Aboriginal communities, the Technical & Scientific Advisory Committee prepared a report in May 1995 recommending a revision of the boundaries to adequately reflect the original cultural & natural values. The boundary review, which will reduce the total area by about 30% and add a number of small areas, is part of a package of planning measures to increase the credibility & sound future management of the site.