



Riversleigh World Heritage Advisory Committee #1 – Communiqué 16-18 August 2022

The Riversleigh World Heritage Advisory Committee acknowledges and respects the strong connections that Waanyi people have with Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park, which includes the Riversleigh World Heritage Area, which dates back at least 37,000 years.

The inaugural meeting of the fifth Riversleigh World Heritage Advisory Committee (RWHAC) was held 16 August 2022 in Mount Isa, with site visits on 17-18 August to the Riversleigh World Heritage area and Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park.

RWHAC comprises an independent chair and 14 members and provides advice to the Queensland and Australian Government Ministers and management agencies on matters relating to the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage of the Riversleigh World Heritage Area. This advice incorporates and integrates First Nations, scientific and community perspectives. The Queensland Government is to be congratulated for the breadth and depth of expertise and commitment amongst the collective RWHAC membership.

This meeting was the first for almost three years and committee members were briefed on both the Periodic (IUCN) and Outlook (UNESCO) monitoring and reporting cycles completed during that time without collective RWHAC advice. Additionally, significant infrastructure and interpretative redevelopments were undertaken during this period at the Riversleigh Fossil Centre in Mount Isa and at D-Site in the Riversleigh World Heritage Area.

RWHAC strongly recommends ensuring future continuity of the RWHAC to enable ongoing provision of independent advice and expertise to the two governments.

First Nations Partnerships

RWHAC acknowledged the significant work and congratulated those involved with the following initiatives:

- **Gurra Gurra Framework 2020 - 2026** – RWHAC noted the Department of Environment and Science’s (DES) commitment to working in genuine partnership with First Nations peoples, including the development of Agreement Making and Co-stewardship frameworks to achieve stronger outcomes for Country and people.
- RWHAC looks forward to the release of the **First Nations World Heritage strategy** later in 2022.
- **Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park Management Plan 2022** - DES is to be congratulated for the wonderful partnerships evident in the development of the Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park Management Plan 2022 and filmed by NITV. RWHAC is excited by the opportunities offered by integrating Waanyi priorities and aspirations in cooperative management of the Park and the Riversleigh WHA, and the protection and presentation of its natural and cultural values. RWHAC expressed a strong interest in providing input to the Visitor Thematic Strategy during 2022-23.
- RWHAC congratulated the Waanyi Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (WNTAC) for the development of the **Waanyi PBC 2020–2025 Strategic Plan** and committed to supporting the strategic priorities and its strong vision for Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park.

RWHAC congratulated the Waanyi, Queensland Museum and DES for their successful partnership to deliver the **Fossil Schools project**, providing education to students using outreach fossil kits developed by the Queensland Museum. **RWHAC recommends that funding be sought to research and prepare complementary cultural heritage outreach kits, led by the WNTAC.**

- RWHAC noted the Waanyi’s application for an **Australian Heritage Grant** to develop a *Fossil Dreaming* project was unsuccessful. This project sought to present relationships between cultural and natural values of the Riversleigh WHA and develop interpretative media that could also be used at D-Site. Valuable feedback from the Australian Government and RWHAC will inform another application in the upcoming round of Australian Heritage Grants. RWHAC will seek advice regarding possible funding sources to **undertake cultural archaeological assessment** at Boodjamulla. RWHAC noted and strongly endorsed Waanyi’s aspiration to progress towards a submission for **national heritage listing** of cultural values.
- RWHAC strongly endorsed the continuation of the **Riversleigh Site Marker project** and **recommends that funding be allocated beyond this year for this significant and ongoing project.**
- RWHAC applauded the inclusion of Waanyi input into Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service **scientific permit application approvals** for Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park.

Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage Values

RWHAC was excited to inspect the completely redeveloped Riversleigh Fossil Discovery Centre at Outback at Isa. The committee was provided a background briefing on the history of the Fossil Centre, which initially opened as part of the Queensland Heritage Trails Network in 2001. In 2019, with support from the Queensland Government’s Outback Tourism Infrastructure fund, works commenced to significantly upgrade the fossil centre. New displays and interpretation were developed and installed in 2020. Mount Isa City Council is to be applauded for the quality of the new visitor experience that combines exquisite fossil specimens with a guided tour to provide a memorable presentation of the outstanding universal value of the Riversleigh WHA.



Tour guide Alan Rackham showcasing the redeveloped Riversleigh Fossil Discovery Centre

RWHAC also inspected upgraded orientation and interpretation infrastructure at D-Site. While some interpretative signage to include Waanyi cultural information was yet to be installed, the upgrades were noted as a significant improvement. During the self-guided walk, a Waanyi RWHAC member shared knowledge about the diverse traditional food and medicine resources along the track. **RWHAC strongly recommends that DES work with the WNTAC to continue strengthening cultural heritage interpretative signage along the self-guided walking trail at D-Site.**



The new signage at D Site in the shade under the Boodjamulla snake wrought iron intallation

New Initiatives

RWHAC was advised that the current Commonwealth funding allocation of \$145k per annum from the National Heritage Trust for the Executive Officer position and RWHAC operations is due to cease in June 2023 and has remained static for well over a decade. Considering salary and other cost increases over this period, such non-indexed funding has resulted in significant funding shortfalls. **RWHAC strongly recommends both Queensland and Australian Government Ministers agree on increased levels of funding to support the ongoing expert advice provided by World Heritage advisory committees and enable delivery of priority projects that**

contribute to the obligations identified within the World Heritage Convention and Intergovernmental Agreement.

RWHAC appreciated updates on the following new initiatives:

- **Dinosaur Tourism Advisory Committee (DTAC)** – The RWHAC was pleased to learn that the Riversleigh Fossil Discovery Centre is part of the newly formed DTAC, which comprises five Outback Queensland palaeo-tourism experiences working collaboratively to market their interpretative centres.
- **Mount Isa Centenary celebrations** will occur in 2023 and possible promotion opportunities were identified for Riversleigh, in partnership with Mount Isa City Council.
- All published scientific data associated with registered Riversleigh specimens are in the **updated Queensland Museum (QM) database**. As of January 2022, 749 type specimens (a special status which represents new species of animals and plants) have been described from Riversleigh. Of these, 238 have been submitted to QM with the remainder at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). RWHAC noted that a full audit of UNSW held specimens is required to comply with QM’s policy and procedures.
- The ongoing and significant **research** of Riversleigh’s fossils by the University of New South Wales in partnership with other researchers was acknowledged. It was noted that UNSW does not currently have funding available to undertake further major field trips to the Riversleigh WHA.

RWHAC noted that, unlike the first four terms of the committee, the current committee does not include a representative of the Burke Shire Council. While the Riversleigh WHA lies predominantly within Mount Isa City Council, Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park falls predominantly within Burke Shire and a significant proportion of visitors accessing the Park arrive via Burke Shire. Previous Council representatives were strong advocates for, and promoters of the outstanding universal value of the Riversleigh WHA. **RWHAC requests that Ministerial consideration be given to reinstating a position for a Burke Shire Council representative on the committee.**

Summary of recommendations

RWHAC strongly recommends ensuring future continuity of the RWHAC to enable ongoing provision of independent advice and expertise to the two governments.

RWHAC recommends that funding be sought to research and prepare cultural heritage outreach kits, led by the WNTAC.

RWHAC recommends that funding be allocated beyond 2022-23 for the significant and ongoing Riversleigh Site Marker project.

RWHAC strongly recommends that DES work with the WNTAC to continue strengthening cultural heritage interpretative signage along the self-guided walking trail at D-Site.

RWHAC strongly recommends both Queensland and Australian Government Ministers agree on increased levels of funding to support the ongoing expert advice provided by World Heritage advisory committees and enable delivery of priority projects that contribute to the obligations identified within the World Heritage Convention and Intergovernmental Agreement.

RWHAC requests that Ministerial consideration be given to reinstating a position for a Burke Shire Council representative on the committee.