

1-6-2019

## Marnda Gardairri: Facilitation of an Indigenous Ranger Rock Art Workshop

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### Recommended Citation

Marshall, Melissa; Wallis, Lynley A.; and Golson, Kate, "Marnda Gardairri: Facilitation of an Indigenous Ranger Rock Art Workshop" (2019). *Nulungu Insights*. 1.

[https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/nulungu\\_insights/1](https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/nulungu_insights/1)

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# Marnda Gardairri: Facilitation of an Indigenous Ranger Rock Art Workshop

Melissa Marshall, Lynley A. Wallis and Kate Golson

Nulungu  
Publication  
Series

Nulungu  
Insights No. 3



## **WARNING: This document may contain images and names of people who have sadly passed away.**

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Co-Editors: Mrs Melissa Marshall and Ms Anna Dwyer  
Advisory Editor: Dr Lynley Wallis

ISBN-10: 0-9941879-7-0  
ISBN-13: 978-0-9941879-7-0  
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The author accepts full responsibility for any omissions or errors contained in this paper.

Vanessa Margetts of Mud Map Studio was responsible for the template design of Nulungu Insights.

### **Cover Photo**

*Marnda Gardairri participants during a site visit in 2017. Photograph courtesy of Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation from the workshop image gallery.*

### **Cover Artwork**

*Seeing Country* by Nyapuru Laurel. Nyapuru Laurel was a Walmajarri artist and educator from the Kadjina Community (part of Millijidee Station) in the Kimberley region of Western Australia on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. Along with her sisters, brothers and mothers, Nyapuru advocated to set up the remote Wulungarra Community School and, through her work, contributed to the passing on of knowledge of the land, law and culture to future generations. She passed away in August 2015. Extracts from *Seeing Country* are located throughout this publication.



## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to Sean McNair, Lynsey MacDonald and William Hicks (Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation), Ken Mulvaney (Rio Tinto Iron Ore - Pilbara Operations), and Sharon Reynolds (Woodside) for their assistance and support in making the workshop a reality. A vote of appreciation is also offered to all of the rangers, Traditional Owners and participants at the workshop.

The team would also like to thank the Australian Heritage Council, the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Energy.

Thank you also to the Nulungu Publications editorial team for their hard work in bringing this manuscript to fruition.

Photographs and accompanying images have generously been supplied by Nulungu Research Institute UNDA and Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation as part of the image gallery compiled from the event.

## **Funding**

Funding for the event was generously provided by Rio Tinto Iron Ore-Pilbara through the Net Benefits Fund and Woodside Petroleum.

## **Acronyms**

RTIO: Rio Tinto Iron Ore - Pilbara  
WA: Western Australia



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# INTRODUCTION

The Marnda Gardairri Indigenous Rangers Workshop was held from 3–5 October 2017 on the Burrup Peninsula in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The event, which was hosted by the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC), brought together rangers from across Australia to discuss rock art conservation and management. The workshop was given the title ‘Marnda Gardairri’ as this means rock scratching/engraving on the Burrup Peninsula.

The workshop was developed by MAC in collaborative partnership with Rio Tinto Iron Ore-Pilbara Operations (hereafter ‘Rio Tinto’) and the Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) (hereafter ‘Nulungu’). Rio Tinto and Woodside Petroleum funded the workshop, with Mel Marshall and Lynley Wallis of Nulungu engaged to coordinate and facilitate the event, assisted by Kate Golson.

## Workshop Scope and Objectives

The purpose of the workshop was to enable rangers from across the country to meet, network and share experiences, knowledge, ideas and information about their activities and approaches, the challenges they encounter, and their successes and achievements. The organisers chose the Burrup Peninsula as the workshop location to showcase the conservation and management activities of the MAC Land and Sea Rangers group, particularly the challenges of looking after Murujuga National Park (MNP), which

is surrounded by intensive industrial development. The participants from across Australia in turn had opportunities to learn from both MAC’s and each others’ experiences, and to share their own stories.

In addition to staff from MAC, 48 representatives from the following ranger groups and Aboriginal organisations participated: the Yaburara and Coastal Mardudhunera Corporation, Marduthuni Rangers Land and Sea, Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation, Kuruma Marthudunera Aboriginal Corporation and Nyiyaparli from the Pilbara; the Nyikina Mangala Rangers from the Kimberley; the Ngarrindjeri Lands and Progress Association, the Ngadjuri Nations Aboriginal Corporation and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara from South Australia; the Thamarrurr Rangers at Wadeye, the Njanjma Rangers, Kakadu National Park rangers, the Warddeken Land Management, and the Wardaman Rangers from the Northern Territory; the Balnggarrawarra Rangers, and the Laura Rangers (Cape York Peninsula) from Queensland; the Healthy Country Murumbung Rangers of the Australian Capital Territory Parks and Conservation Service; rangers from Galamban (Wreck Bay), and the Office of Environment & Heritage, Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage from New South Wales; and the Budj Bim Rangers and Parks Victoria staff from Victoria. As well, representatives from the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Rio Tinto and Woodside attended, as did two members from one of MAC’s main research partners, the University of Western Australia (UWA).



Figure 1 Participants during the Marnda Gardairri workshop held at the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation Head Office in Dampier.



For the MAC Rangers, the workshop was an opportunity to present on their activities and experiences with joint management, as well as to learn about the approaches and strategies that other groups have developed. For many of the participating rangers, the workshop was the first time they had presented publicly, thus providing them with professional and personal development in a supportive environment with their peers.

Rio Tinto's main objective in co-funding the event with Woodside was to support the building and strengthening of knowledge and skills among the MAC Land and Sea Rangers that would help them in managing the Murujuga National Park.

## Workshop Structure

On each morning of the three-day workshop, the MAC Rangers took the participants on a field trip: on Day 1 this was to Deep Gorge for a Welcome to Country and to view the engraved art; on Day 2 the group drove across the Burrup Peninsula to visit Woodside's Northwest Shelf Project Visitor Centre, passing Chevron's supply base for Barrow Island, Witnall Beach and Hearson's Beach; and on Day 3 the party visited Hearson's Cove, where the men viewed a men's only area that had been disturbed by industry and recently rehabilitated, while the women were taken to a high point near the area, where they could see down to the site.

After each field trip, participants convened at the MAC head quarters for presentations and discussions on a wide range of management issues identified by MAC staff as being of interest to them and about which they would like to hear from other ranger groups.

## DAY 1

### WORKSHOP OPENING

After welcoming the MAC management, staff and Elders, facilitator Lynley Wallis outlined the workshop's scope and objectives and agenda. Ken Mulvaney of Rio Tinto gave an introduction on behalf of the funders. The participants then spoke about the things they were interested in seeing emerge from the

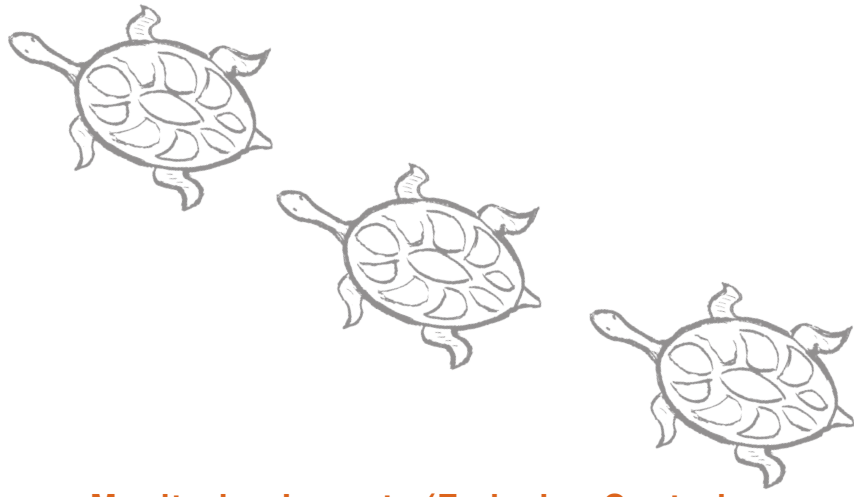
workshop, which included:

- To see organisations working together.
- To share contact details, network and keep in touch with each other.
- To get information about cleaning and dusting off sites and dealing with wasp nests on rock art sites.
- To share in ideas from the other rangers and see how that can be applied to our areas.
- To look at the policy that drives the practices of ranger groups and management plans in different areas, such as who is looking after cultural places.
- To talk about access to sacred sites, including rock art sites, by uninitiated people.
- To understand more about contractual arrangements and dealings on national park and conservation lands elsewhere, and how people might be managing heritage outside of parks. What are the opportunities that exist, how have people diversified into other areas such as conservation on places outside national parks?
- To learn skills, knowledge and techniques to identify the age of rock art. Lynley clarified that, while this was not a hands-on workshop, there would be opportunities to discuss what people might want in the way of practical skills and knowledge and training opportunities and where they could find out more.
- To learn more about MAC's databases and mapping systems.

MAC Ranger manager Sean McNair provided information about MAC and the context within which it operated, including background to the conservation



Figure 2 Some of the female participants during the Day 1 Field Visit to see some of the spectacular rock art of Murujuga.



arrangements with governments, information on the National Heritage Listed area and MNP, the activities the rangers are engaged in and key options for MAC's future development.

## CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF ROCK ART

### Vandalism and Graffiti

#### ***MAC Rangers - Brandan Stack and Conrad Aubrey***

Graffiti at the art sites is a big problem and time-consuming. MAC strategies to mitigate this include recording, monitoring, removal and community education.

#### ***Wardaman Rangers - Damien Sing and Basil Marital***

Damien and Basil discussed issues that have arisen during the undertaking of rehabilitation and preservation of rock art on an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), including clearing of art sites to prevent damage from fires and the monitoring of unauthorised access by pig hunters in cars with dogs, who spread weeds and seeds. A major concern was the limited powers of rangers to take action against trespassers, which they are wanting to lobby the government to have changed.

### Fire

#### ***MAC Rangers - Mark Clifton and Sarah Hicks***

Prescribed burning has not been done for a long time on the Burrup Peninsula given high risks with close proximity of industrial plants. MAC is exploring ways to proceed with the Department of Parks and Wildlife and Fire and Emergency Services.

#### ***Warddeken IPA - Lorraine Namarnyi and Georgina Vallance***

Fire management and rock art protection are intrinsically linked. Rangers burn in the early dry season and suppress and fight wildfires in the late dry season. Have an eight-year old Carbon Abatement Scheme with Conoco Philips.

### Monitoring Impacts (Emission Controls, Dust etc)

#### ***MAC Rangers - Brandon Stack and Jami Lee-Jenkins***

MAC is using drones to monitor impacts of emissions on the art and scientists are helping to determine what the cause of the damage to engravings is.

#### ***Balnggarrawarra Rangers - Larry Banning and Damien Harrigan***

Since 2012, on Cape York Peninsula, the rangers have (re) discovered some 60 art sites and are continuing their searches. They protect their heritage from wildfires by combining on-ground burning and incendiaries to reduce fuel loads, clean out litter and then make fire breaks. They protect the art from animals by trapping pigs, mustering feral cattle and erecting fencing.

## DAY 2

### WORLD HERITAGE LISTING

#### ***MAC Rangers and UWA – Sean McNair and Jo McDonald***

Exploring whether to pursue World Heritage Listing, potentially in similar way to NHL with research base.

#### ***NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area, NSW - Daryl Pappin and Leanne Mitchell***

Much of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area (WHA) is private property, which makes the protection of heritage sites challenging. Rabbits and other pests destroy sites and heritage values as do land owners 'ripping' the ground to destroy rabbit burrows. World Heritage Listing (WHL) has meant that traditional owners (TOs) are less often denied access to their lands, and they are sharing their culture widely with visitors. However, WHL funding is limited, TOs only have conditional access to private lands, and tour operators are still not being accompanied by TOs on their tours. Aboriginal people must be recognised as rights holders rather than merely stakeholders. Must ensure that the work of researchers is approved by the TOs early on.



***Parks Australia, Rock Art Management at Kakadu, NT - Kadeem May***

Kakadu National Park is World Heritage Listed for its cultural and natural values and jointly managed by the TOs and government. More than 5600 sites recorded with potentially many more sites yet to be, but only two cultural heritage workers and limited resources. Rangers assess damage to art sites and resolve in culturally right way. Research partnerships for the monitoring and managing of the rock art very important.

***Budj Bim Rangers, Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation (WMAC), Southwest VIC - Debbie Malseed and Rowan Pickett***

WMAC provides social services, runs economic enterprises and manages over 3000 hectares of Aboriginal-owned land spanning 10 properties, all part of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape, which was listed in 2004, and which includes three IPAs. The rangers look after all the on-ground activities, including cultural site protection and the collecting, propagation and planting of seedlings.

**STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

***MAC Rangers***

MAC Rangers want a viable long-term future and have extended their income-generating activities to fee-for-service contracts and the hiring of their boat for research. They are also exploring the potential of cultural tourism and the development of conservation agreements.

***Antara Sandy Bore Rangers, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara, SA - Janko Beska and Neville Entata***

The rangers are responsible for fire and feral animal management and threatened species work on five Indigenous Protected Areas over 103,000 km<sup>2</sup> of arid freehold land a vast area with few roads and little infrastructure. Very difficult to manage the rock art and other important places, often need helicopters to access many of the sites.

**PUBLIC PROMOTION OF ROCK ART AND KNOWLEDGE**

***Laura Rangers, Cape York Peninsula, QLD - Destini Ross and Roy Banjo***

The rangers own and look after two stations where many of their art sites are. These are in good condition. One, Split Rock, is open to the public and a lot of bus tours pass through. Road dust became an increasing problem, so the government sealed it, which has led to even greater visitor numbers. There is no continual ranger presence so graffiti is a problem. At Mushroom Rock, visitors need a guide. The rangers maintain the tracks and fences to keep out animals and have dampened the dust from animals and visitors by putting matting down.

***Healthy Country Murumbung Rangers, ACT Parks and Conservation - Krystal Hurst and Jackson Taylor-Grant***

The ranger network comprises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working across the ACT Parks and



Figure 3 Participants during the Day 2 field trip to Woodside's Northwest Shelf Project Visitor Centre.

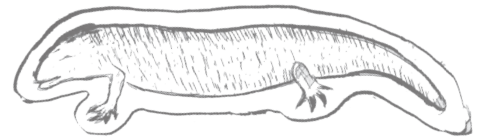


Figure 4 Participants during the Day 1 visit to the Flying Foam Massacre memorial site.

Conservation Service. They help to manage culturally significant areas and projects associated with the management of national parks, reserves, wildlife, forests and rural lands in the ACT. They are working with the Ngunnawal TOs on the implementation of cultural fire regimes, to reinvigorate traditional cultural burning practices. Fire is a major problem and wild fires have shaped wider community attitudes towards management practices. The rangers are monitoring seven art sites, where they have removed wooden fences because they are a fire hazard. They are using computer technology to map sites.

## DAY 3

### CULTURAL GOVERNANCE

**MAC Rangers - Sean McNair and Michael Boona**  
Ranger manager Sean McNair acknowledged the role of the MAC elders, the cultural bosses, in guiding the rangers. Michael Boona, a cultural advisor to the rangers, discussed the formation and operation of the Circle of Elders which advises the MAC rangers.

**Parks Victoria - John Clarke**

The Heritage Office of Parks Victoria is helping groups to strengthen their cultural heritage through the development of Country Plans. There are a good number of Indigenous staff working there and a mentoring program to retain them. Relationships with local mobs very important. Bushfires are the biggest threat to the approximately 180 rock art sites in the Grampians. Most of the art is pigment art. Three-

dimensional laser scanning is used to record and monitor damage to sites.

**Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne, VIC - Dr Lyndon Ormond-Parker**

This Melbourne-based Centre works with Aboriginal communities across Australia on the conservation of people's moveable cultural heritage, mostly objects and artworks, but also audio-visual material.

### RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS AND PROTOCOLS

**MAC Rangers**

MAC rangers discussed the 'respect' ethos that guides their work, contextualised the ensuing discussion.

**Galamban Aboriginal Tours, Jervis Bay area, NSW - Clive Freeman**

When the government handed back Booderie National Park, the TOs negotiated an agreement with the NSW National Park and Wildlife Service (NPWS) that saw the latter lease it back. Galamban is a family company specialising in Aboriginal art and culture, including cultural tours in the Park.

**Murujuga Australian Research Council Linkage Project, UWA - Jo MacDonald**

UWA have established a research partnership with MAC and Rio Tinto through the Australian Research



Council (ARC) Linkage Project scheme. This allows researchers to work in partnership with the MAC rangers to achieve common goals. Funding and in-kind resources are committed to the project by “industry partners” which then allows additional funding from the ARC to be secured through a competitive grants process.

**Murujuga Research Partnerships and Protocols - Mariah Reed**

MAC has developed research partnerships and protocols that afford them a high level of control over researchers and research that is undertaken on their traditional lands. It is about MAC having control rather than researchers coming in and telling people what they are going to do; it is a partnership that is more equal.

**MAPPING, DATA CAPTURE AND DATABASE**

**MAC Rangers – Mariah Reed**

MAC is using mapping, methods of capturing data and the database to manage the rock art.

**Murujuga: Dynamics of the Database, UWA - Sarah de Koenig**

As part of the Murujuga ARC Linkage Project, PhD student Sarah has been working with MAC

on mapping, data capture and their database. The rangers are using Filemaker Pro to collect large amounts of data each day in the field at places they might not return to for many years. Each of the three teams can take up to 800 photos a day, which are catalogued each night.

**Njanjma Rangers, Bim Work, NT - Ursula Badari and James Dempsey**

The rangers clean up rock art and spray the weeds to look after the old paintings. Today there are roads near the art sites and they manage the dust by planting trees. The trees also screen the art from tourists. See: <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/104726>

**SEA COUNTRY MANAGEMENT/COASTAL LAND MANAGEMENT**

**Thamarrurr Rangers, Wadeye, NT - Mark Crocombe**

Over the last 10 years with the erosion of dunes, the rangers have begun to see stone arrangements appearing, which no one knew about. The lesson from this is that it is important for rangers to keep their eyes open for such unexpected things.

**Ngarrindjeri Lands and Progress Association, SA - Georgina Trevorrow**

Since the return of their traditional lands in 2008, Ngarrindjeri people have been busy with rehabilitation

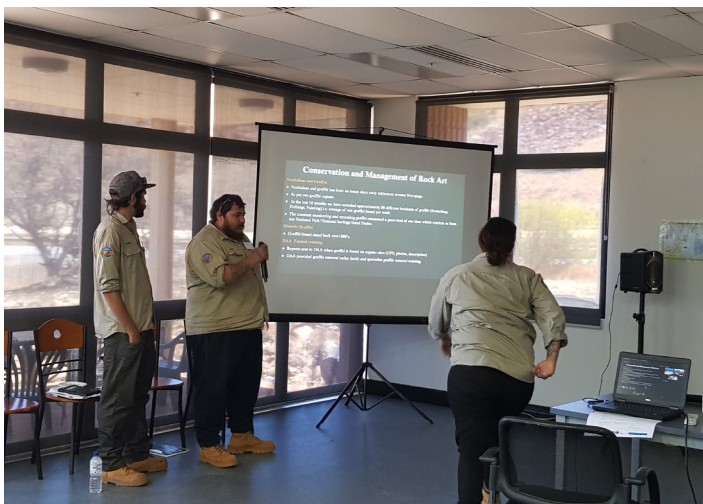
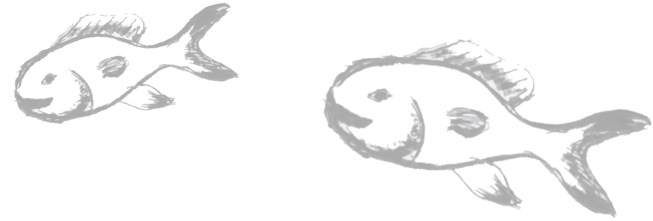


Figure 5 Some of the MAC Ranger team presenting at the workshop.



Figure 6 Kadeem May from Kakadu National Park presenting at the workshop on rock art management in a World Heritage Area.



work, the monitoring animals and birds, managing sites, managing feral animals and carrying out prescribed burning and providing visitor education. They operate a commercial nursery where collected seed including bush foods and medicine is propagated. Off track 4WD operators are the biggest problems and then invasive plants and animals. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mEMTAcOY40>

## FUTURE ACTIVITIES AND REQUESTS

During the workshop, the participants raised suggestions for the future activities:

### ▣ To hold another workshop, perhaps in southeast Australia.

Nulungu has begun exploring the holding of a similar workshop in coming years with one of the Victorian-based organisations.

### ▣ To establish a Facebook group

A Facebook group ('Indigenous Rangers in Australia'), mediated by MAC has been established, which many of the workshop participants have joined. Any Indigenous rangers working in Australia are welcome to join the group.

### ▣ To consider the value of rangers attending Australian Archaeological Association (AAA) conferences

Some of the participating rangers regularly attend AAA conferences with researchers who they are collaborating with, to share their findings with the archaeological community. For those who have not and would like to, there are sponsorship opportunities available to these and other conferences through such bodies as the AAA, the Working On Country Program and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

## Evaluation and Recommendations

There was an overwhelming response to the invitations sent out to Indigenous ranger teams across the nation to attend Marnda Gardairri, with a total of 39 rangers attending representing groups from all mainland states (unfortunately none of the groups invited from Tasmania participated).

Along with the 11 MAC rangers, their elders, the other participants included Nulungu representatives, two UWA academics, and staff from Rio Tinto and Woodside. With some 60 people present, the workshop venue was at capacity. Should this initiative be staged elsewhere in the future, the initial interest indicates that this could double as part of the next iteration.



Figure 7 Krystal Hurst and Jackson Taylor-Grant from ACT Parks and Recreation presenting to the workshop.



Figure 8 Peter Jeffries CEO MAC explaining to women about some of the cultural heritage management issues at Hearson's Cove.

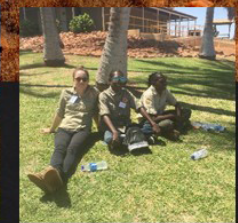
Discussions among the ranger participants were overwhelmingly positive, and since the workshop a network has been formed. Towards the end of the final session, the participants had the opportunity to provide feedback about whether the event was worthwhile or not and their thoughts on the presentations, discussions and field visits. People remarked that:

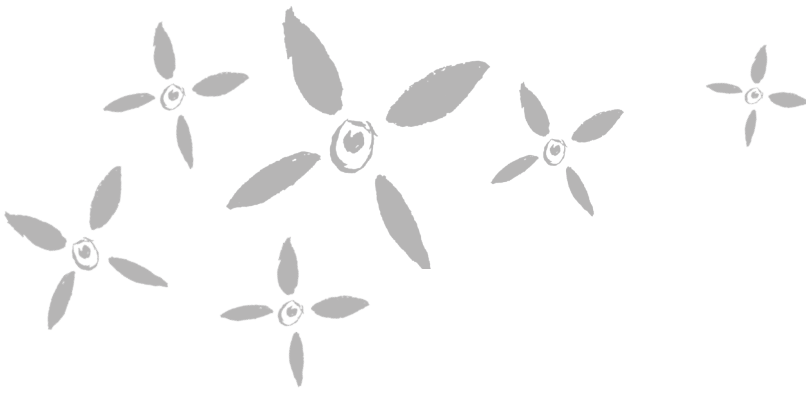
- ▣ It was great to come together, to connect and share, on common themes.
- ▣ It was very good meeting the other rangers.
- ▣ We have got to visit the Pilbara and learn from you mob.
- ▣ We will be sharing in a report and photos.
- ▣ We are facing similar issues, all working on country.
- ▣ I liked hearing about databases and new ideas about how to do things.
- ▣ It was interesting learning how to make it easier to do things.
- ▣ We're lacking ways to connect across the country, so we could set up a hub online, a digital social network to stay connected. We can share information like new and useful technologies. This might allow

us to think about new ways to negotiate with governments and to develop new approaches to other things.

- ▣ Gerard O'Regan is a Maori rock art specialist who is interested in networking with Australian ranger groups because they're dealing with similar sorts of issues.
- ▣ Thank you for coming together ... We've lost 90% of our country because of mining. It is good to think about how to get them to do the right thing.
- ▣ Let's look at holding this forum next year elsewhere. Canberra decision-makers need to fund ranger groups around country, we need to promote powers for our groups and address our concerns.
- ▣ We're at the beginning of rock art training and looking for practical measures and new pathways.
- ▣ It was fantastic coming across all these fellas, gives us fresh hope, new life. We are the owners of the land not just stakeholders but the holders of rights.
- ▣ Thank you from Nyikina Mangala for inviting us.







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## Author Biographies

Melissa Marshall specialises in Indigenous archaeology, particularly rock art research and working alongside community for tangible outcomes in conservation and management. She holds a Masters in Applied Science (GIS), a Grad Dip in Computer Science and a Bachelor of Arts (majoring in Archaeology). She recently completed her PhD at the Australian National University, working with Indigenous communities and ranger groups in Northern Australia to investigate rock art conservation and management methods in response to contemporary issues. Mel has strong ties to the West Kimberley region, where she has worked as an archaeological and GIS consultant for . Working with peak Indigenous bodies, as well as n15 yearsumerous Working on Country ranger groups and smaller Aboriginal corporations, she has supported a number of community-based research activities and projects. She continues to work extensively in the Kimberley, western Arnhem Land and Kakadu.

Lynley Wallis holds a Bachelor of Science (Honours) from the University of WA and a PhD from The Australian National University. She joined Nulungu Research Institute in March 2016 with longstanding interests in Aboriginal cultural heritage and a

commitment to undertaking collaborative research partnerships with communities. She previously worked at James Cook University, the ACT Government and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. She was also employed as a Senior Lecturer in archaeology at Flinders University (Adelaide) from 2005–2009, before moving to Brisbane to take up a Senior Research Fellow position at the University of Queensland for several years. After that until joining UNDA she ran her own heritage consulting business and worked as an independent researcher.

Kate Golson is a community-based researcher with an interest in community development and organisational change. Kate has worked with Kimberley communities and organisations on projects concerned with sustainable development, conservation and land management, tropical river research, oral history, native title and cultural heritage protection. Born in Canberra and raised in Papua New Guinea and England, she holds an MA in Anthropology (Development Studies) from Sydney University. Kate is currently the Chairperson of the Environs Kimberley Board, inspired by ‘the considered and informed activism of co-founder Pat Lowe’.

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