

**REPORT TO NGAANYATJARRAKU SHIRE /MRWA ON CONSULTATIONS AND HERITAGE
CLEARANCE FOR THE PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF A BYPASS ROAD TO THE WEST OF
WARBURTON ROADHOUSE**

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Executive Summary

This is a heritage clearance report for a proposed new section of road to be located to the west of Warburton roadhouse. The purpose of the road, as explained to me by Shire President Damian McLean, is to act as a Bypass to divert heavy vehicles using the Great Central Road in the vicinity of Warburton roadhouse and community. The Bypass is required primarily for safety reasons. Heavy vehicles transiting the area pose a danger to the pedestrian and small vehicle traffic in the immediate area near the roadhouse and community areas. Many of the heavy vehicles do not require to use roadhouse facilities or to be in the vicinity of the community, hence it is to everyone's benefit to provide this Bypass. Moreover, the amount of heavy through traffic will increase substantially when the West Musgrave Mining Project commences. For that Project, up to several dozen very long articulated vehicles per day will be travelling the Highway between the Jameson area and Leonora (and beyond).

One of the main considerations in planning the route of the Bypass was to ensure that it would give a sufficiently wide berth to the roadhouse complex, partly to achieve the goal of safety, but also because of heritage considerations, which are discussed in the report. The route also had to be satisfactory from a physical environmental point of view, bearing in mind that there is a large creek (Elder Creek) in the vicinity, along with areas of low-lying ground.

The proposed Bypass section of road is approximately 14.9 km in length . It departs in a westerly direction from the Great Central Highway around 7 km north-east of Warburton, and rejoins the Highway at a point around 7 km to the west of Warburton. The proposed route that we examined in the course of the clearance had previously been pegged by Elves Brites of the Shire. A map showing the GPS coordinates of the route, as prepared by Mr Brites for this project, is attached.

Consultations with Mr McLean and Mr Brites took place on 19th Oct 2019. The field clearance involving two senior traditional owners from Warburton was undertaken on 20th Oct.

As a result of the clearance work I confirm that the proposed route, as pegged, has 'heritage clearance' and that there are no heritage constraints on construction proceeding as proposed.

Background

Prior to the present exercise, I had earlier this year undertaken similar clearances for Bypasses to the west and to the south of Jameson community. The construction of Bypasses in each of these cases relates to the progressive upgrading of the road network in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, and to an associated need to ensure the safety of community residents and of all road traffic in the context of the increasing usage or planned usage of the roads by heavy vehicles. Best practice and legislation (the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972) dictates that heritage surveys be undertaken in relation to these kinds of works.

It should be clarified that the carrying out of heritage surveys of this kind by Ngaanyatjarra Council anthropologists is not expected to constitute a consultation exercise to canvass whether or not the local people are in favour of the roadworks proposals. That would be a matter for the Shire. However, in the course of the present survey (as with previous ones undertaken at Jameson) it appeared to me that the local people spoken to were in fact happy with the idea of the Bypasses and with their proposed locations (heritage issues aside).

Another point to note is that the heritage clearance work of this kind undertaken in the Lands is much more than a matter of compliance with legislation and best practice. Culture related to the landscape is a living issue of great significance to Ngaanyatjarra people. If a mistake were made and a cultural site damaged in the course of roadworks, the consequences could be enormous. As it happens, this is particularly the case with the present Bypass, since the roadworks will be taking place in the vicinity of the all-important Marlu (red kangaroo) Dreaming complex. (Also in the case of the Jameson Bypass exercise, the Marlu complex was again nearby, although it is a different Dreaming Track here.)

Not only is the Warburton roadhouse Bypass in the vicinity of a Marlu Dreaming Track, but there are places used in connection with men's ceremony that are also quite close by, and even a storage shed for men's sacred objects. Staff involved in the planning of the Bypass, such as Elves Brites, as well as Damian McLean, are acutely aware of these matters and took them into account in how they approached the matter. It was obviously also important that the anthropologist undertaking the work had a deep prior knowledge of all the Dreaming-related issues in particular.

Consultations and clearance work

19th and 20th Oct 2019

On 19th Oct I had talks with Damian McLean and Elves Brites about the work. Both of them had already traversed the proposed route, in Elves's case several times, and they had taken AJ (local senior man Andrew Jones) along with them on one of these exercises. With their own deep local knowledge, they already knew that the route was almost certainly clear of any heritage issues – and really my involvement was mainly a technicality, undertaken to supply an 'official' clearance as I am an anthropologist who can verify these kinds of outcomes. . (However it helps that I have a long experience in the area and I 'know the

tjukurrpa', as well as knowing the traditional owners who need to be taken on the survey and provide the clearance.)

I then went to see Phillip West and AJ to discuss them participating in the clearance and the timing as to when this would occur. Phillip West is the senior man at Warburton and has a detailed knowledge of the Marlu tjukurrpa (and others) and the sites associated with it. The Marlu is the main tjukurrpa that would be relevant to the clearance. AJ is a middle aged man who is Phillip's son-in-law. He has a good knowledge of the relevant matters in his own right. He has often acted as Phillip's 'off-sider' in heritage related work that I have undertaken around Warburton. We arranged that we would undertake the work the following day (Sunday).

On the morning of 20th Oct there was initially a bit of doubt about us being able to do the work, as a big fight had taken place on the Saturday evening after the football grand final and the conflict had spilled over to the morning. However, Phillip and AJ indicated they were still ready to go ahead.

Another slight problem arose when Betty and Debra West jumped into my vehicle after I pulled up near Phillip's house. They wanted to take part, I think partly because on many previous occasions they have come along in my car with Phillip, when we have set out on bush trips of various kinds. But it was not appropriate that they come on this occasion, because I needed to make sure that the men would speak completely freely when referring to the Marlu tjukurrpa. Because this tjukurrpa is a male domain, the presence of women invariably constrains the men's discussion of it, and important things may not be mentioned. AJ himself was making comments that indicated his irritation at their attempts to come along. The situation in this case was made additionally awkward by the fact that Betty West as a senior woman knows the sites and the stories perfectly well - and she knows that I know that she does - so it was a little humiliating to her to be asked not to come. However, she and her daughter Debra did comply reasonably gracefully and got out of the car.

Driving along the pegged route

We proceeded to the beginning of the route, at the northern end. In the vehicle were Phillip West, AJ, Elves Brites and myself. Elves drove the route through the bush following the line of his pegs. There were approximately 50 pegs in all - roughly one every 300 metres.

Given that there turned out to be no sites anywhere within 2 - 3 km (or more) of the proposed route, the easiest and most effective way to approach the description of how I assessed the heritage issues for this clearance is not via a painstaking description involving waypoints along the route and the precise location of sites that are actually quite distant. Rather, it is best undertaken via an account of the issues that arose in relation to the Tjukurrpa landscape in the area - in such a way as to show how I was able to assess the proposed Bypass road as not interfering with this cultural landscape.

The account:

The following are the main points and factors that were relevant to this survey, presented in such a way as to show how they enabled me to know with confidence that 'this project will not interfere with heritage values':

1. There are two main tjukurrpa 'complexes' that could possibly be implicated in this exercise. One, the main one, is the Marlu tjukurrpa. The second is the Ngirntaka (perentie lizard). I knew in advance from my past work that I would expect to be hearing about both of these today. I also knew that the Marlu would be relevant in the central to northern section of the Bypass route, while the Ngirntaka was likely to come into calculations towards the southern end.
2. The Marlu potentially poses by far the most significant issues. It is necessary for a person undertaking a clearance such as this to understand this tjukurrpa and its significance in the desert culture, and to know where the Marlu being travels in the larger landscape as well as in the vicinity of this project. This kind of understanding could not be reached if one were to come in 'cold' to undertake this survey. It needed to be pre-existing and to have been acquired through long experience. With this knowledge it would be possible to assess the details of the tjukurrpa that apply to the specific situation.
3. Working with an informant like Phillip West, you have someone who not only knows the general facts as well as the nuances of the Marlu tjukurrpa in the larger as well as the local context, but has a detailed knowledge of the immediate cultural landscape in a fully contextualised way. I as the anthropologist did not have this latter level of knowledge because I had not been to this specific locality before, or travelled along this particular 15 km stretch of country that we were concerned with. Phillip, on the other hand, was immediately and completely at home where we had brought him, and could 'read off' the whole tjukurrpa-related situation virtually effortlessly.
4. At the starting point of the proposed Bypass route (at the northern end), Phillip began talking about the Walpatju tjukurrpa. I knew that this tjukurrpa animal is a player in the Marlu tjukurrpa complex, of a relatively minor kind. From a point in the North Warburton Range a few km to our north, the Walpatju 'man' appears on the scene and begins to play a part in the unfolding saga of the Marlu. The Marlu himself is undertaking a great journey from up Wyndham way, down south through Warburton and on to Yamarna Station, near Cosmo Newberry. It is not necessary to go into the details of all this here – to do so would take up pages. The point is that when an informant like Phillip mentions the Walpatju, the anthropologist needs to be able to put it into perspective. Phillip told me that Walpatju stopped at a pulpa (cave) around 3 or 4 km to the west of where we were. From there, he next appeared at some small hills about 3 km to our east, between where we stood and the roadhouse area. I knew that after this, Walpatju went on to the immediate Warburton locality, where he interacted extensively with Marlu, after which both 'men' continued on to places much further to the west and south. Therefore, there was no need to worry about the Walpatju in terms of any possible impact from the current project. (I already knew that the Marlu himself remained to the east of Elder Creek at all times in this region and was thus not directly implicated at all in the issue of the Bypass road.)

5. As we continued to drive south along the proposed Bypass route, Philip kept talking for a while about the Walpatju, the intricacies of the story, and how this Tjukurrpa related to certain family members of the past. None of this posed any problems in relation to our task. He was also keeping up an almost continuous monologue about other features of the landscape that we were slowly driving through – for example, a tree from which he had once cut an artefact using an axe, a place where he had speared a kangaroo, a claypan where he and his family had camped many years ago, and the like. All this patter serves to demonstrate how grounded he is in the country we are traversing and leaves no possible room for doubt that he knows exactly where he is in a landscape that to the outsider looks almost exactly the same as a thousand other localities.
6. A few km further along, he stopped mentioning the Walpatju, because we had gone out of range of its influence.
7. At one point he remembered that there was a soakage nearby, called Nyanturratjarra, that he had not seen for many years. We deviated from our route to look for this, and then returned and resumed our correct path, following the pegs.
8. Towards the end of the route (i.e. in the southern section) he began talking about the Ngirntaka tjukurrpa. He mentioned a site Walyipi which I knew to be away to the west (maybe 15 km). I am aware of the details of travel of the Ngirntaka 'man'. He comes from places hundreds of km away (to the west), There are sites associated with him that are within Ngaanyatjarra territory, such as Papala on the north Warburton road perhaps 50 km away. Walyipi is probably the closest named site where he stopped as he approached the Warburton region. But today Phillip told me that in the sandhills to our west (and perhaps 4 – 5 km away), there are a number of places where small round rocky outcrops are to be found amongst some sandhills. These are Ngirntaka places. I hadn't heard this before. From there the Ngirntaka travels over to the Browne Range just to the south of Warburton community. As such, he theoretically crosses the southern portion of the proposed Bypass route, but there are no sites or traces of him to be found through there.
9. The only other issue that needed to be considered in this clearance concerned the location of the 'men's shed' (the storehouse where men keep their ceremonial objects). This is quite close to Elder Creek and at least 3 km away from the route.
10. As a kind of confirmation of the tjukurrpa complexes that we were concerned with today, Mr West sang two turlku (tjukurrpa songs) during our travels, one for the Walpatju and one for the Ngirntaka.
11. At the end of the route, for confirmation purposes I asked Phillip West, "So it is all right for them to build a road along where we just travelled?" And he replied very clearly that it was.

We came out at the Great Central Highway after completing our drive-through of the 14.9 km route, then drove back to Warburton. The actual driving of the route took four hours. Taking into account preliminaries and post-survey logistics, it was a day's work all up.

Outcome

The route of the proposed western Warburton Bypass as pegged by Elves Brites and indicated on the map below, and as examined by myself and traditional owners on 20th Oct 19, is clear of heritage concerns.

Local participants in survey

Phillip West

Andrew Jones



Map showing proposed Warburton North West Bypass in blue and existing route between the roadhouse and community in yellow.

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