

## **Riversleigh World Heritage Advisory Committee #7 – Communique**

**1 November 2024**

*The Riversleigh World Heritage Advisory Committee acknowledges and respects the strong connections that Waanyi people have with Boodjamulla National Park (Aboriginal land), which includes the Riversleigh World Heritage Area. The Park has numerous visible and spiritual archaeological and cultural sites demonstrating the Traditional Owners continuous occupation and association with the area, with some sites dated at 37,000 years old.*

The seventh meeting of the Riversleigh World Heritage Advisory Committee (RWHAC) was held jointly with the Naracoorte Interagency Reference Group (IRG) at Struan, South Australia, to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the joint UNESCO World Heritage listing of Riversleigh and Naracoorte as the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (AFMS). The meeting was preceded by a site visit to the Naracoorte Caves, and followed by public science talks at Naracoorte Town Hall and an all-day World Heritage Festival Program at the Naracoorte Caves.

RWHAC comprises an independent Chair and up to 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 values of the Riversleigh World Heritage Area. This advice incorporates and integrates First Nations, scientific and community perspectives.

RWHAC congratulates Minister Powell on his appointment as Minister for the Environment and Tourism and Minister for Science and Innovation and extends an invitation to attend the final RWHAC meeting to be held before the expiration of the Committee's term (24 April 2025).

RHWAC recognises the opportunities that the merging of the Tourism and Environment portfolios presents and is keen to continue to work closely with the Department to better profile Riversleigh. For several years, RWHAC meetings have benefited from the attendance of a Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) representative and look forward to this continued collaboration.

### Waanyi Partnerships

- RWHAC received an update on the Waanyi Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC), including the proposal to seek the renaming of Riversleigh to a traditional Waanyi name.
- RHWAC also noted that the planning for the phased reopening of the Lawn Hill Gorge and park facilities include the unique opportunity to enhance social and economic development potential through strong Waanyi involvement. It is critical that appropriate infrastructure is considered and delivered to entice and support tourists back to the region.

.../2

### Identification of Cultural and Natural Heritage Values

- RWHAC was briefed on the Waanyi's Riversleigh Fossil Dreaming Project, identifying and linking fossils to Waanyi culture. This important Australian Heritage grant-funded initiative is on track to deliver publicly accessible resources in early 2025.
- The Waanyi Boodjamulla Culture Plan, a thematic management plan for cultural integration and capacity building, was workshopped with Elders in October 2024. Mapping of cultural sites within the publicly accessible part of the Riversleigh World Heritage Area (D Site) will take place in 2025.
- Funding for processing of bulk Riversleigh material and fossil extraction at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) is limited. Applications have been submitted for Australian Heritage Grants to support further research. University of Adelaide researchers have received significant funding to advance understanding of the palaeobotany, taxonomy, palaeoecology and speleogenesis of the Naracoorte deposits.
- RWHAC noted a recent global review of scientific publications which recognised that publications about Riversleigh's fossils, mostly by UNSW researchers, were significantly more numerous than those for any other palaeontological or anthropological World Heritage site. The volume and diversity of these publications demonstrates the immense scientific value of the Riversleigh fossil resource and the contribution of Australia's scientific researchers to understanding our continent's environmental history through deep time. Such insights provide new approaches to the complex problems of current species conservation.
- Joint AFMS meetings facilitate collaboration between researchers engaged in identifying new values inherent in the extraordinary World Heritage fossil records.

### Protection and Conservation of World Heritage Values

- RWHAC is pleased that the Boodjamulla Redevelopment Project is underway, led by the Boodjamulla Cooperative Management Council (Waanyi and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service), following the major flooding event in March 2023.
- RWHAC was briefed on the commencement of the audit by Queensland Museum (QM) staff of part of the extensive collection of Riversleigh fossils held at UNSW, with some specimens packaged and relocated to Brisbane. Published Riversleigh fossils receive QM registration numbers and are Queensland State assets.
- Subsequent audits will enable the development of a long-term plan for the relocation of many other specimens from Sydney to QM's collection storage over time.

### Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage Values

- RWHAC members were impressed by the quality and extent of the tourist-focussed infrastructure at the Naracoorte Caves, ranging from an extensive diorama of the ancient Naracoorte ecosystem to the children's play and learn playground, and both self-guided and guided interpretative tours of the various caves. Discussion focussed on the development of joint marketing strategies and products as elements of an AFMS Tourism Masterplan, in collaboration with TEQ and Tourism South Australia. Identification of potential sources of funding and preliminary development work for a shared tourism-focussed vision will occur before the next RWHAC meeting.
- TEQ advised RWHAC of the 2025 Australian Tourism Exchange. A draft World Heritage Experiences document was presented and opportunity for input will occur. Discussion focussed on Queensland opportunities for niche nature-based and palaeotourism experiences.
- Members were briefed on the RWHAC Three-Year Plan (2022-2025) including the development of a Riversleigh Values Transmission Enhancement Project. Outback Queensland has several fossil sites and palaeotourism opportunities however only Riversleigh is recognised by UNESCO as one of the world's richest and most exceptional fossil sites. There is opportunity to improve communication of World

Heritage values to support the enhancement of Riversleigh palaeotourism products and experiences. This will be further enhanced by the outcomes of the Waanyi Fossil Dreaming Project and the Riversleigh Fossil Discovery Centre at Mount Isa.

- An update was provided by Professor Mike Archer on the Burramys Project (using fossil records to support relocating endangered mountain pygmy possums from alpine regions to lowland rainforest environments) which has gained international attention following a successful pilot breeding program. Professor Archer's team has submitted an Australian Heritage Grant application aiming to gather further climate change data from processed Riversleigh fossil material - successful applicants to be notified in early 2025. AFMS members agreed to scope a potential ARC Centre of Excellence in palaeoecology research and climate change modelling to build on such research.
- It was noted that the Australian Government (AG) hosts the Australian Convict Sites website for that serial property and members requested AG representatives consider developing and hosting an integrated AFMS website.
- It was noted that the 'Big Bird' interactive display at the Riversleigh Fossil Discovery Centre in Mount Isa was inoperable and that this is an interesting tourism element of the display. RWHAC requested Mount Isa City Council submit a quotation for repair to DETSI to seek potential funding support.
- It was noted that the UNSW Library was in discussion with researchers to develop and present a display of Riversleigh fossil material with the possibility of developing a travelling exhibition.
- RWHAC discussed significant progress made between meetings towards delivering priorities in the Committee's Three-Year Plan, including the Riversleigh Content Toolkit in collaboration with TEQ, a Riversleigh Style Guide for future signage, the Riversleigh Climate Change Project, finalisation of the Riversleigh Research Priorities 2023-2030, progressing discussions to develop a Riversleigh display/exhibition, and supporting two Riversleigh related Australian Heritage Grant applications.
- AFMS members again raised concerns with AG representatives that funding agreements with the state, which support the work of World Heritage advisory committees, has remained static for 20 years despite significant lobbying from committees and the Queensland Government. This continues to impact the committee's ability to meet in-person on Country to view and discuss important matters which impact on our obligations under the World Heritage Convention.

The next and final RWHAC meeting for this term will occur by mid-April 2025.