

Indigenous Heritage Background Paper

Prepared for the Stokes Inlet Steering Group March 2007
by Mieke Bourne
reflecting the views of the Traditional Owners

Introduction

A management plan is being prepared for Stokes Inlet to ensure that its high environmental, social and economic values are managed sustainably into the future.

The Inlet is valued by the indigenous community. A number of sites and mythological stories have been recorded around the Inlet and unregistered sites have been identified in the area. Stokes Inlet is also important as part of a broader cultural landscape.

It is important to have the Traditional Owners (TOs) views and input on the values, threats and future management of the Inlet.

This background paper has been prepared using available reports and information and it reflects the views of the Traditional Owners. The recommendations within this paper come from the TOs. It is important that all their views are presented within this report but some of the recommendations may be fall outside the scope of the Inlet management plan and will have to be covered by other planning processes. The recommendations are presented here for discussion by the steering group.

Background

When asked how they would like to be involved in preparing the management plan for Stokes Inlet, the TOs said they would like to have a workshop at the Inlet.

The workshop was organised for December 2006 by Doc Reynolds (a TO) and David Guilfoyle from Restoring Connections with funding from two SCRIPT (South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team) supported projects (developing estuary management plans and restoring connections). A representative from each of the Traditional Owner family groups was present at the workshop along with SCRIPT and DOW (Department of Water) staff and consultants including two archaeologists from Eureka and an anthropologist.

As part of the workshop two days were spent walking around the recently burnt part of Stokes National Park on the western side of the Inlet and through denser vegetation where a walk trail is planned.

Over the two days, artefacts were discovered and recorded. During the workshop there was general discussion about management and issues associated with the Inlet. Eureka has prepared a detailed report on the

workshop. Much of the information within this background paper is summarised from their report.

Issues

Community and organisational views on the Inlet, scientific information and available literature were used to determine what the priority issues are for Stokes Inlet. Questions were then developed on each issue with the expectation that the answers would provide a better understanding of the issue.

Below in italics are the questions that were raised in reference to cultural heritage at the Inlet. These questions are answered and recommendations listed.

What are the significant cultural sites at the Inlet? Are further surveys required?

Eight archaeological and three ethnographic sites have been recorded in the Stokes Inlet area. Directly around the Inlet there is a recorded artefact scatter, ochre quarry / artefact scatter and a mythological site Walitch Benwenerup (*Walidj Benwenerup is the local Nyungar term for a particular spot in Stokes Inlet. It means 'place where the eagle came to scratch (the cliff) and die'.*)

A number of unregistered artefacts and sites were found during the workshop which indicates that there are likely to be many more sites throughout the Stokes Inlet area that have not been registered. Eureka mentioned that approximately 1% of the Park has been investigated for archaeological sites and none of the known sites have been adequately recorded. This suggests that there is a need for future surveys. The TOs did not indicate that extensive surveys throughout the area were a priority.

Many of the recommendations within the Eureka report relate to the need for the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) to be made aware of all the artefacts and sites found during the Stokes Inlet Traditional Owners workshop. This can be achieved by providing DEC with a copy of the report once the TOs and the Goldfields Land and Sea Council have approved it.

Recommendation 1: archaeologists should be engaged to fully record the sites identified during the workshop and investigate management options in liaison with Traditional Owners and DEC.

Recommendation 2: in consultation with Traditional Owners further investigation should be conducted to determine the potential status of the two clusters of stones as burial sites.

What needs to be done to better protect or enhance these sites?

Given the limited field time available during the workshop, protection of the sites that were encountered was only discussed briefly and no conclusions were reached. The protection of the sites and artefacts that were encountered during the workshop can be further discussed with the TOs and DEC as part of recommendation 1, listed above. Other sites in the area are not accessible and as such their protection is not as great an issue.

Should interpretation of the cultural values be introduced? In what form?

It was generally considered a good thing to let the public know about Indigenous cultural sites so that they would be better able to appreciate Nyungar culture and its importance. However, the management of specific sites is best done on a case-by-case basis and more focussed discussion than was possible during the study should occur about this. Sometimes there are hotly debated discussions between Indigenous people about appropriate management of specific sites and any debate should be resolved as much as possible before taking a decision to publicise site-specific information.

One of the ways in which interpretation of cultural values was discussed was through signage along the proposed walk trail and associated viewing platforms planned for between south camp and the beach. Traditional Owners agreed that international standards should be applied to the interpretive signage. Some also thought that each of the interested family groups should be asked to contribute designs and dreamtime stories. These two proposals may complement each other well. Traditional Owners supported the location of a viewing platform at the top of the dunes on the western side of the estuary bar. They felt that interpretive signage about traditional and historic use of the area by Nyungar people was appropriate but that it should be developed in conjunction with them.

Traditional Owners requested that they be actively involved in the planning process for the walk trail. They preferred that the trail make use of existing trails such as the old graded track that was found. Although no specific heritage sites were located during the team's walk through the area, the team was unable to adequately assess the area because of time constraints and difficulties experienced getting through the dense bush. Thorough engagement of Traditional Owners in the planning process may obviate the need for further formal heritage assessment of the location of the proposed trail.

Recommendation 3: that the Traditional Owners be further engaged in assisting with the planning arrangements for the walk trail, its location and associated interpretive signage.

Can fire, Inlet levels or access damage existing cultural sites/values?

Traditional Owners are concerned that vehicles should not damage sand dunes or the freshwater pools lying between them at the mouth of the estuary. This could be able to be managed through the careful placement of barriers,

either by moving natural items such as boulders that can block the path of a four-wheel-drive, or the placement of bollards where necessary.

As many of the artefacts are made of stone material, it is unlikely that fire will damage them.

Recommendation 4: the freshwater pools are protected and four-wheel-drives are restricted from damaging the dunes at the mouth of the Inlet.

What recommendations should be included in the management plan to protect and enhance the cultural significance at the Inlet?

The cultural significance of the Inlet is not restricted to artefacts and sites. The health of the water, fish and whole environment is culturally important to them. As are the management of the Inlet and park and the facilities provided.

A number of issues associated with the Inlet and general views on the future management were discussed during the workshop, some these are listed below:

- Traditional Owners thought that noisy and disruptive activities on the water such as water-skiing and jet-skiing should be discouraged by management if not banned altogether.
- Use of the names as Walidj Benwenerup and Stokes Inlet on the management plan being prepared for the Inlet was supported by some Traditional Owners.
- Traditional Owners expressed a wish to have an equal say in country and that management agencies should recognise Nyungar values and concerns in any future developments and management plans.
- Traditional Owners agreed that a Nyungar warden role should be developed for the Esperance area. An important part of the warden's work would be heritage management. The warden would assist in coordinating an Indigenous voice for country throughout the Esperance area, including Stokes.
- Traditional Owners strongly supported the development of bigger vegetation buffers around waterways where this is feasible. They felt especially strongly about this in the catchment area, but also thought that vegetation buffers should be used around the estuary where this is feasible and appropriate. They thought that in the riverine areas the buffers should be at least 100 metres between the farming paddocks and the rivers, and this might need to be increased to account for slope.
- Traditional Owners want to have a briefing from appropriate knowledgeable scientists in order to better understand the dynamics of fish populations in the Stokes estuary and the Lort and Young Rivers.
- Traditional Owners support the assessment of any potential contamination of the fish themselves from the algae in the water or toxins that leach into the catchment.
- The Department of Environment and Conservation should discuss planning with Traditional Owners at Stokes Inlet Park with a view to making arrangements to ensure that traditional ownership of the park is

acknowledged and respected in matters such as the need to establish services within the park that are consistent with the need for Traditional Owners to feel comfortable within it.

- There was a strong view that freshwater springs should be protected. Allied to this was the expectation that there would be no use of groundwater for service development such as showers or flushing toilets. However rainwater collection and use was seen as appropriate.
- The *Benwenerup* mythological site on the eastern side of the estuary bar may be able to be more actively protected by restricting vehicle access to the dunes.
- The Traditional Owners do not want to see development on eastern side of Inlet.
- One of the TOs would like to see rigid fire control so that over a 10 year period the park has some kind of mosaic burn on it.
- A number of the TOs do not want to see netting of fish by anyone.
- Some of the TOs would like to see a bigger camping bay for families as their community travel in large groups, gas BBQs are good but would also like to see fire circle.

Recommendations for the Draft management plan arising from the Tradition Owners:

Recommendation 1: archaeologists should be engaged to fully record the sites identified during the workshop and investigate management options in liaison with Traditional Owners and DEC.

Recommendation 2: in consultation with Traditional Owners further investigation should be conducted to determine the potential status of the two clusters of stones as burial sites.

Recommendation 3: that the Traditional Owners be further engaged in assisting with the planning arrangements for the walk trail, its location and associated interpretive signage.

Recommendation 4: the freshwater pools are protected and four-wheel-drives are restricted from damaging the dunes at the mouth of the Inlet.

Recommendation 5: use the traditional name for Stokes, Walidj Benwenerup, to name the management plan.

Recommendation 6: support the formation of an indigenous warden role for the Esperance area.

Recommendation 7: protect freshwater springs that feed into the Inlet.

Additional notes:

- The TOs would like to be consulted on all management in the National Park and be given an opportunity to have input into any actions.
- Any fencing used to protect freshwater pools and springs should not restrict animal movement.
- DEC should take care where firebreaks are constructed and maintained.
- Goldfields Land and Sea Council should be supported in preparing a card system to identify TOs in National Parks.

References

Morse, K., Wright, G., Ryan, I. and Stokes, C. 2007. Report of the Results of a cultural heritage survey of Nominated Areas within Stokes Inlet National Park, South Coast, Western Australia. Eureka Archaeological Research and Consulting. The University of Western Australia.

Data provided by the Department of Indigenous Affairs, 2006.

Notes recorded by Mieke Bourne during the Stokes Inlet TO workshop, 2006.

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