

Media Release:

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Fire damage at Nganalam Art Site – Keep River National Park

The Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service is investigating the cause of a fire in Keep River National Park that has severely damaged Aboriginal rock art at the Nganalam Art Site.

The Nganalam Art Site within Keep River National Park, 470km west of Katherine, will be closed to the public until Aboriginal rock art conservation experts review the affected areas.

Parks and Wildlife Service Executive Director Graham Phelps said the damage caused by the fire was of a major concern and every effort would be made to repair the site.

“While 80 percent of the art at the Nganalam site has not been affected, there is significant damage to some of the art on the sandstone rockface,” Mr Phelps said.

“The Park falls within the Aboriginal tribal area of the Mirriuwong and Gadjerong Aboriginal people and we are currently in talks with senior Traditional Owners of the area, concerning the damage and restoration to the rock art,” he said.

“We have undertaken to do all we can to repair and restore the area, with the consent of the Traditional Owners, and we will be looking for advice from rock art conservators on this matter.”

Mr Phelps said the Parks and Wildlife Service is continuing to investigate the cause of the fire.

“Not only has this fire caused significant damage to Indigenous artwork that is hundreds of years old, it also destroyed park infrastructure around the site which details the history of the Nganalam Art site,” he said.

“The intensity of the fire has melted the aluminium structure supporting the art viewing platform and the interpretation signage placed on the structure.”

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Media Note:

Professor Paul Tacon, Griffith University, 07 555 29074 or 0432 981 552 – can provide comment on the artwork and its significance. His area of expertise include the anthropology of art and religion, material culture, rock-art/palaeoart, archaeology of hunter-gatherers, museums, Indigenous perspectives of the past, body art, photography and landscape archaeology.

Interview requests with Graham Phelps can be arranged through contacting the NRETA media liaison.

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