



## Australian Fossil Mammal Sites - Riversleigh World Heritage

### Advisory Committee Meeting Communiqué March 2019

1. The Riversleigh Community and Scientific Advisory Committee (RCSAC) welcomes the opportunity to respond and offer advice to the Minister to support World Heritage obligations for the Riversleigh section of the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (AFMS) (identification, presentation, conservation, protection and management).
2. The Committee's first meeting for 2019 was held in Mount Isa on 21 March and was attended by nine of twelve Committee members. Also in attendance were Mr Matt Bron, Director Southern and Outback Country, Tourism and Events Queensland; Ms Sarah Jess, Ms Marnie Augusteyn and Mr Christian Pearce, QPWS; together with Executive Officer Ms Ellen Thyer and Departmental observers Ms Lyn Wallace and Mr Adam Musial.
3. The Committee congratulated Ms Lyn Wallace on her recent appointment as Manager of the Department's World Heritage Unit. The Committee also congratulated Ms Ellen Thyer on her recent substantive appointment as Riversleigh Executive Officer.
4. The Committee congratulated the Queensland Museum (QM) on the proposal to develop a Riversleigh display as an addition to its Lost Creatures exhibition and looks forward to updates on its development. In preparation, QM staff have reviewed all scientific publications describing Riversleigh specimens and have developed a catalogue of all type specimens – those single specimens or sets of specimens used to describe and name a new species for the first time. The physical location of each type is now being confirmed, and procedures will be developed for the eventual repatriation of all type specimens to QM to ensure compliance with Queensland Government Audit Office requirements.
5. The Committee also congratulated the Museum on providing support and training in fossil preparation, stabilisation and display as well as care and collection management for a staff member from Outback at Isa's Riversleigh Fossil Centre.
6. The Committee congratulated Mount Isa City Council on its successful application to the Queensland Government's Outback Tourism Infrastructure fund for financial support to revitalise the Riversleigh Fossil Centre. The Committee reminded Council of the expertise freely available amongst its members to support this project, not only in the sciences but also interpretation and project management. The Committee applauded the excellent work

currently being undertaken by staff at the Riversleigh Fossil Centre.

7. The Committee was briefed on the developing program to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the listing of the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites on the World Heritage register, and noted that the key event will be at D Site. The Committee was very disappointed to learn that a scheduling conflict may prevent the Minister from attending the 2 July 2019 event.

The Committee urged Departmental staff to continue their engagement with the Minister's Office to resolve the scheduling matter, noting the Minister's verbal confirmation in November 2018 of her intention to lead the anniversary celebrations. The Committee also recalled the Minister's commitment at that time to prioritise opportunities to raise the profile of Queensland World Heritage Properties and to improve engagement between the Department and Traditional Owners through the establishment of a Partnerships Branch. The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary provides significant opportunity to advance both of these aspects that are critical for increased awareness of and engagement at the Riversleigh World Heritage Area.

8. The Committee again discussed the challenges in securing regular access to Bitesantennary Valley by commercial tour operators that require the negotiation of access consent protocols. It was agreed that further efforts be made to engage with Waanyi Advancement Limited and the Waanyi Prescribed Body Corporate to better promote the opportunities that could be presented by commercial tours.
9. The Committee was briefed on the developing planning for the D Site refurbishment capital works including updated replacement signage for the self-guided fossil trail. The QPWS project manager expressed his appreciation of Committee feedback and input to date. The long overdue refurbishment should result in upgraded visitor facilities to showcase the site as an internationally significant World Heritage site, presenting the area's values in accordance with article five of the World Heritage Convention (to ensure that effective and active measures are taken to protect, conserve and present).

It was noted that the visitor facilities would be upgraded in a staged approach, with the first stage being improved arrival signage, a new and much needed toilet block, and refurbishment and modest expansion of the existing interpretative structure. The Committee stressed the importance of providing shade and seating in the harsh environment and ensuring that there was a narrative that linked the various elements together in a coherent manner. A subsequent stage would include a larger more appropriate interpretative shelter to replace the existing structure. It was noted that a firm design program would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting in July, coinciding with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

It was agreed that the preferred pedestrian direction along the fossil trail incorporating the mesa should be clockwise to better support the interpretative narrative, and that the new signs should include the scale of the animals described in the fossil record along the trail. It was noted that the new trail signage would be installed by the end of June 2019.

10. The Committee discussed opportunities to increase engagement both with the Waanyi Traditional Owners more broadly and the Lawn Hill Riversleigh Pastoral Holding Company specifically. It was suggested by Burke Shire that there were opportunities for Riversleigh WHA interest groups including the Department and the Committee to work more closely with schools in Doomadgee and Burketown to raise awareness of the importance of the site in understanding Australia's faunal evolution. It was noted that the inherent inquisitiveness of children should not

be underestimated as a means of also engaging adults. It was suggested that Burke Shire and Mount Isa City Councils might be able to assist with transport costs to enable students to visit and potentially be involved in research activities.

11. The Committee was keen to hear how the region might have been adversely impacted by the January-February 2019 monsoonal floods. Southern Gulf Natural Resource Management advised that the greatest long-term challenge will be managing the spread of weeds including prickly acacia as a consequence of emergency fodder drops in areas not previously used, routinely inspected or managed as livestock feed areas. It was advised that the usual protocols associated with purchasing fodder from known suppliers, and hence known weed contaminants, and feeding in carefully selected and routinely inspected locations could not be followed in such desperate situations. The Committee indicated its interest in receiving regular reports on any spread of invasive weed species, especially as they may impact on the WHA.
12. The Committee was delighted to learn from Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) of the imminent tour of significant United States fossil sites, including two World Heritage sites, by ten Queensland dinosaur/fossil tourism operators. This initiative by TEQ will provide substantial opportunities for operators to observe and study best practice examples of science interpretation and tourism operations. The Committee was also pleased to hear about the recently announced Year of Outback Tourism funding, and encouraged both Mount Isa City and Burke Shire Councils to seek funding support for Riversleigh 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.
13. The Committee received a brief report from the Lawn Hill Riversleigh Pastoral Holding Company and was pleased to learn about their proposed training initiative for local young people in the operation of drones.
14. The RCSAC would like to thank the Minister for her ongoing interest and support of the work of the RCSAC.

Dr Graeme Potter  
Chair, Riversleigh Community and Scientific Advisory Committee  
March 2019