

State lashed over rock art heritage bid

EXCLUSIVE

PAUL GARVEY

The Australian archaeologist who first identified the scientific significance and extent of the Burrup Peninsula's rock art has slammed the West Australian government's handling of the region ahead of a proposed World Heritage listing for the site.

Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek on Friday will officially confirm an application to

have the Burrup Peninsula on WA's northwest coast officially registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The area is home to the world's largest collection of rock art, with an estimated 1 million petroglyphs — many of which are tens of thousands of years old — carved into the distinctive red rocks. The Burrup area is also home to some of Australia's largest industrial projects, with Woodside set to expand its LNG projects and private company Perdanam poised to begin construction shortly of a new urea plant.

Robert Bednarik, who led one of the first scientific studies of the Burrup rock art in the late 1960s and who is now the head of the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations, says the WA government's support for those developments made a mockery of the UNESCO declaration and described the state as "the world's worst serial offender of destroying cultural heritage".

"That Australia has the audacity to nominate a severely threatened cultural monument for World Heritage only illustrates our arrogance further," Mr Bednarik wrote in his submission to the federal government's Section 10 review into the Burrup Peninsula. "I have been involved in several such nominations and have written those of three international properties. The nominators of the Dampier cultural precinct seem unaware of the preconditions for nomination."

Looming confirmation of the heritage application — revealed by The Australian on Monday — could see the area join the Great Barrier Reef on the UNESCO list.

Ms Plibersek cited the proximity and potential impact of Clive Palmer's Central Queensland coal project to the Reef when announcing on Wednesday the government's decision to block the project. That was the first time the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act has been used to block a coalmine.

"The mine is an open-cut coalmine less than 10km from the Great Barrier Reef and the risk of pollution and irreversible damage to the reef is very real," Ms Plibersek said.

In his submission, Mr Bednarik said the Burrup was the only place on the planet where a monument of world significance has to share its location with a vast industrial estate.

He said there was an "irresponsibly dense" concentration of industry in the area, arguing that nitrogen oxide emissions from the liquefied natural gas and chemical plants in the area were breaking down the patina that preserves the rock art.

The competition between industry and culture in the area, he

said, was entirely the creation of inept planning by WA governments dating back to the 1960s.

"There is no doubt that if there had been proper consultation, the entire Dampier Archipelago would have been made a National Park then. The industry would have found alternative locations, and the confrontation would never have arisen," he wrote.

"The solution to this dilemma is simple: the immovable cultural heritage, one of Australia's greatest treasures, cannot move, nor should it; the industry can."

'It's still cheaper to rent than buy'

EXCLUSIVE

MACKENZIE SCOTT

Despite rapidly rising rental costs over the past two years, it is still cheaper to rent than buy four in five homes around the country.

Analysis by housing data firm PropTrack found that at the end of 2022, some 21 per cent of homes in Australia remained cheaper to buy than rent after interest rates spiked in reaction to inflationary pressure.

Fewer than 7 per cent of homes in NSW and Victoria were cheaper to mortgage than rent, while Darwin is the only capital city where locals benefit from owning as the majority of homes (94 per cent) are cheaper.

Nine consecutive interest rate rises since May have increased repayments on the average \$500,000 loan by about \$12,000 each year, outpacing any benefit for buyers from the 4.51 per cent national falls from boomtime peaks.

Repayments are also proving more expensive than rental costs, despite those facing massive increases of about 20 per cent over the past two years.

PropTrack economist Paul Ryan said housing affordability had worsened in recent months, with the number of homes more attractive to buy shrinking over the final half of last year.

"Prices are a bit out of line with rental costs, and that's the kind of the thing driving our forecasts," he said.

PropTrack anticipates the property market will experience price falls of about 10 per cent nationally through 2023 if the Reserve Bank raises the cash rate 50 basis points. If any more than one more rise of 0.25 per cent occurs, the falls could be deeper, particularly down the east coast.

Relative affordability is best found in Queensland (40.1 per cent of homes cheaper to buy) and Western Australia (57 per cent). It is relatively cheaper to buy 17.9 per cent of homes in South Australia and 22.5 per cent of properties in Tasmania and Canberra, which is largely in line with the national average.

Mr Ryan said the relative affordability of renting put more pressure on an already stressed marketplace as fewer people choose to transition to home ownership.

"How do the interest rate increases affect rental markets? One of the ways that happen is it makes buying less attractive," he said.

'Tax-free income' for remote doctors

EXCLUSIVE

SARAH ISON

A leading Alice Springs doctor says health practitioners in remote Australia should receive tax breaks, including tax-free income, to retain the dwindling workforce and attract more doctors to the regions.

The comments follow an exodus of health practitioners from the town in the wake of a crime wave that prompted the Northern Territory government to announce this week it would reinstate blanket grog bans across town camps and communities.

Indigenous Australians Minister Linda Burney, Malarndirri McCarthy, the Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians, and Lingiari MP Marion Scrymgour arrived in Alice Springs on Thursday to meet community organisations and leaders as the town battles severe social issues.

"The purpose of the trip is to meet again with community organisations and community leaders about the implementation of the \$250m Better, Safer Future for Central Australia plan announced by the Prime Minister and NT Chief Minister," said a spokeswoman for Ms Burney.

Royal Australian College of GPs Northern Territory chair Sam Heard said Alice Springs was running at about "a quarter" of the doctors needed across GP clinics in the town and he expected more to leave.

He said six of the remaining doctors had seen their homes broken into over the past month, two of whom ceased work immediately, while one of his colleagues on Wednesday was stopped in her car by youths on bikes who smashed her windows with rocks.

"Especially people with young families, we're going to see even more people feeling they can't stay," Dr Heard told The Australian. "People will make their minds up this year about what

they want to do, depending on what happens."

Dr Heard said significant incentives were needed that would make a difference in the short term. "I'm really promoting the idea of tax-free income for people who work in (very remote Australia)," he said. "There needs to be something very dramatic for that group and something for towns like Alice and Katherine."

Australian Medical Association NT branch president Robert Parker backed the idea of tax breaks to attract more doctors to regions with high demand.

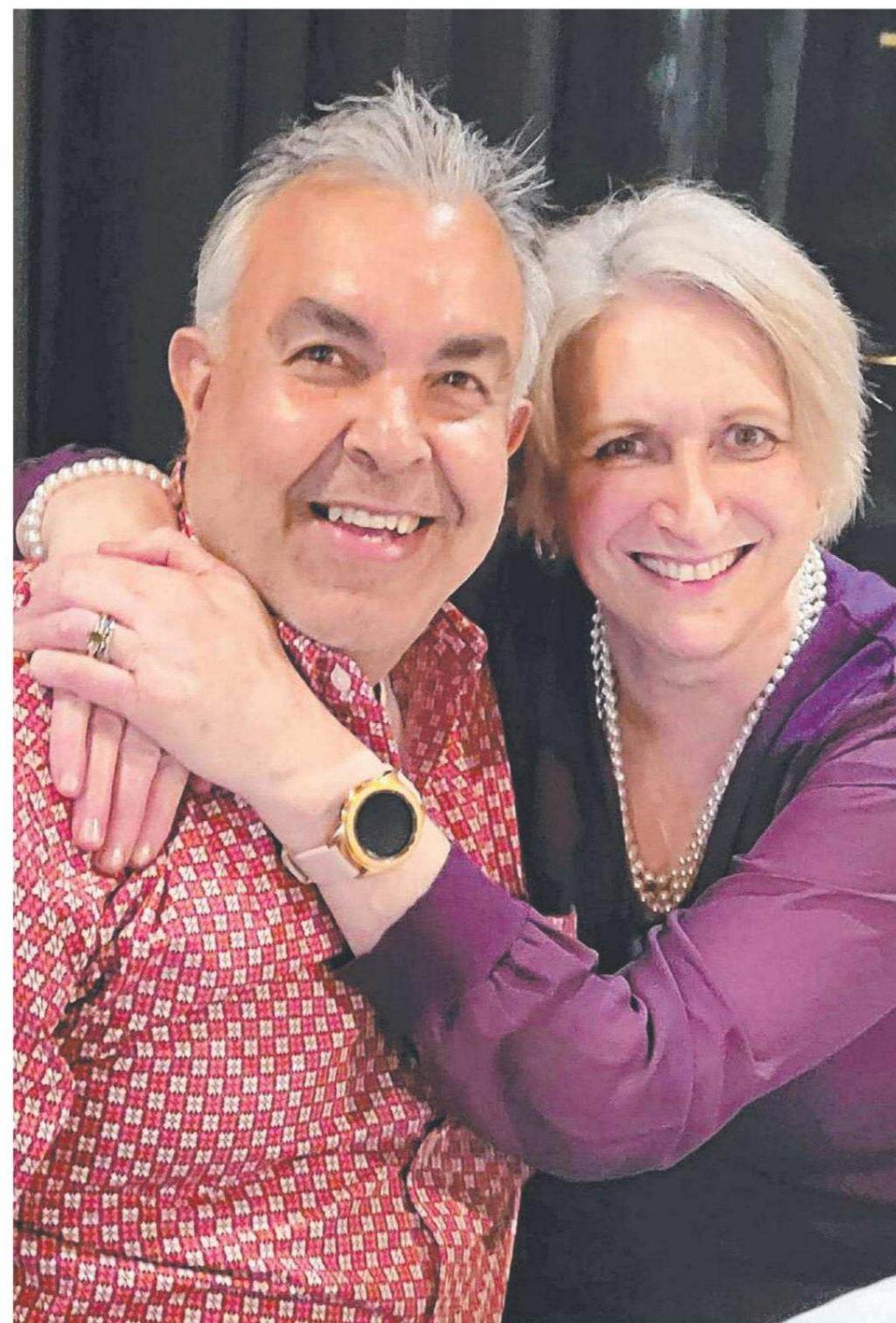
Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation NT branch secretary Cath Harcher, who met with the heads of the health services from across the territory on Thursday, said staffing numbers were "pretty horrible". She revealed the community areas around Alice Springs were almost 70 per cent down in staffing.

Health Minister Mark Butler said the government was "committed to investing in general practice", and addressing workforce challenges was a key part of that goal. "Our government isn't shying away from addressing the health workforce issues in our regions — we are investing over \$160m to attract and retain more health workers to rural and regional Australia through improving training and incentive programs and supporting development of innovative models of multidisciplinary care," he said.

Incentive measures already implemented include 1000 new placements under the John Flynn Prevocational Doctor program to encourage more hospital-based junior doctors to enter general practice in rural Australia. GPs in rural areas are also eligible for incentives under the Workforce Incentive Program, which offers tens of thousands of dollars in bonuses for doctors with multiple years of experience working in rural multidisciplinary care.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: LIAM MENDES

Heart revolution changing women's lives



A relieved microvascular disorders patient Jody Rochecouste with her husband Mario

TRICIA RIVERA

After being diagnosed with a series of microvascular disorders, a sense of relief washed over Jody Rochecouste, who until three months ago had been searching for what was wrong with her health for 30 years.

Once chalked up to anxiety and imagination by doctors who couldn't provide answers for her breathlessness and fatigue, the 56-year-old now knows she has a combination of microvascular disorders including angina, hypertension and microvascular disease.

A hidden affliction, microvascular disorders are a type of coronary heart disease that is seen in small blood vessels and disproportionately affects women.

The disorders are considered harder to detect, as evidenced by Ms Rochecouste whose angiograms, electrocardiograms and other tests pointed to nothing.

"I was laughed at by one doctor and I cannot tell you how that made me feel," she said.

"He was telling me that I had anxiety and what it was causing was all imagined in my head ... I became hesitant every time I went to the doctors and I'd leave things too late and in the end I'd have to go to hospital."

But in a bittersweet vindication, following a visit to the Alfred Women's Heart Clinic in Melbourne, Ms Rochecouste at last has her diagnosis and the right medication to treat it.

Her disorders were detected through a special type of angiogram involving pressure wire technology, where wires four times the width of a strand of hair are inserted into a catheter and travel to the heart to record physiological measurements.

The test is considered a special skill and is not administered in a standard angiogram.

Ms Rochecouste said her newfound knowledge has made her cautious her daughter who is experiencing similar symptoms.



Pioneering Victorian cardiologist Monique Watts

"She's in her early 30s and she's gone to the hospital a number of times in the past couple of years, and they're kind of ignoring her and I'm like: don't let them do that because you don't want to spend over 30 years like I did to get the diagnosis."

Dr Monique Watts, who established the Alfred Women's Heart Clinic in 2018, said being a woman in a male-dominated field helped her detect and raise awareness on microvascular disorders, with just 13 per cent of cardiologists in Victoria female.

"What I found was by virtue of being a female doctor, I was seeing almost exclusively female patients (so) I saw more of the female pathology and I was starting to see patterns," Dr Watts said.

"We certainly need to encourage more women into cardiology, because although we've got fabulous male cardiologists, it's no secret the champions of women's heart disease are women's heart health cardiologists."

She said knowledge of heart disease comes from studies largely conducted with men and has led to "incorrect assumptions" that male and female hearts behave the same despite different physical and biological factors.

Dr Watts is working to develop a protocol for doctors to be trained in administering the test to detect microvascular disorders.

Young woman taunted cop

A young woman shoved a police officer several times and told another to "do something that matters" after she became angry with their "heavy-handed" manner of breaking up a house party with the riot squad, a court has heard.

Maisie Nugent, 21, appeared in Sydney Downing Centre Court on Thursday to plead guilty to two counts of assaulting police in the execution of their duty.

She had been attending a party in inner-city Surry Hills when a specialised police force swarmed

the celebration in the early hours of November 6, 2022.

Footage of police breaking up the party went viral after it was shared on Instagram by Sophie Teo, daughter of brain surgeon Charlie Teo.

Magistrate Daniel Covington told Ms Nugent she had put her career as a carer in jeopardy by involving herself in the incident but he elected not to convict her of the assaults, placing her on two good behaviour bonds for a year.

NCA NEWSWIRE

Urgent call to reform mental health system that favours the rich

EXCLUSIVE

ELLIE DUDLEY

A pre-eminent healthcare economist has deemed the Better Access initiative to improve mental health services "extremely inequitable", as the country's peak psychological body calls on the government to pour more investment into mental health care.

Melbourne University professor and member of the Strengthening Medicare task-

force Stephen Duckett said the former Coalition government's Better Access initiative to expand the number of subsidised psychologist sessions from 10 to 20 favoured wealthy Australians, and didn't improve access to mental health services.

"The Coalition's decision to expand services from 10 to 20 was inequitable, and its benefits mostly flowed to wealthier suburbs that didn't actually improve access," Mr Duckett said.

"(We saw) the same number of psychologists, and if you increase

the number of services that one individual gets that means there's no additional benefits."

Mr Duckett claimed psychologists upped their costs when the additional subsidised services were introduced, and in some instances earned more than GPs.

Last year, the federal government released an independent review which found the Better Access Program had aggravated waitlists and not helped those in rural and low socio-economic areas access services.

But the Australian Psychol-

ogist Society claimed the program had "enabled millions of Australians to access quality psychological care" and called on government to give greater financial investment in mental health services in rural and low-socioeconomic areas to make mental health care more equitable.

"The cost of inaction is far too high. Mental ill-health and suicide are already costing our economy more than \$200bn per year and we must bring this number down," APS president Catriona Davis-McCabe said.

"Our pre-budget submission is vitally important. Australians need the government to take this issue head on. There is no health without mental health, and the risk of not funding mental health adequately will cost not just the economy, but the lives of Australians," Dr Davis-McCabe said.

The APS said the "catastrophic" psychologist shortage was the reason preventing people in low socio-economic areas accessing care through Better Access.

It said it could be resolved if weren't for huge barriers prevent-

ing capable and eager students from attaining degrees and filling critical holes in the workforce.

Postgraduate psychology training is funded at a lower band compared to other health professions, with the federal government paying \$13,369 per student. The APS called for psychology training funding to be equal to general practice, medical studies, agriculture and veterinary science training, at \$27,243 per student.

The APS also requested the government introduce bulk billing for rural psychologists.

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