



# Protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in the Murweh Shire

*Aboriginal cultural heritage gives meaning to  
the Murweh Shire's natural landscape.*







The Murweh Shire is a vast area at the heart of South West Queensland's mulga lands. It includes the towns of Charleville, Augathella, Morven and Cooladdi.

The Bidjara People are the Traditional Owners of the land, descendants of those who have lived in the region since time immemorial. They are people of the bush and the rivers, and maintain an unbroken connection to this Country.



*Aerial view of Murweh Shire countryside*

This booklet has been produced with the assistance of Bidjara Elders, the Queensland Police Service with the assistance of Acting Senior Constable Laurie Bateman, Miriam Airey from the HOPE Program (South West Hospital and Health Service), Southern Queensland Rural Health, and the Cultural Heritage Unit (DSDSATSIP). Photography by Sergeant Gregory Dwyer. Bidjara artwork kindly provided by the artist, Alara Geebung.

"Bidjara Country is more than the  
land and the rivers. It is a living  
environment that sustains  
and is cared for by our people  
and culture."

Keelen Mailman,  
Bidjara Elder

*Bidjara language speaks of the botha (stars)  
of Budhanbill (the Milky Way) over the Murweh Shire*



## Recognising cultural sites and artefacts

Australian Aborigines have the longest continuous cultural history of any group of people on Earth. Dreaming for Aboriginal people expresses the connection between all people and all things. It represents the time when the Spirit Ancestors moved over the land and sea, creating the natural and social world.

The Murweh Shire has a wealth of Aboriginal cultural and sacred sites, artefacts and artwork, and is the resting place for Aboriginal people whose ancestral remains have been placed with care and ceremony.

Particular locations within the Murweh landscape – waterholes and natural springs, caves, sand hills and rocky outcrops – are likely to harbour Aboriginal cultural sites and artefacts.



*Sandstone caves formed over thousands of years*







*Left to right: Scar tree with Bidjara Elder Patricia Fraser; Grinding grooves and stones used for sharpening tools and crushing seeds and ochre; Erosion of the sandstone over thousands of years.*



## Some cultural heritage sites

- Rock art including engravings, stencils and drawings
- Burial sites, often found in caves, rock shelters, sand hills and trees
- Grinding grooves, used to grind seeds and sharpen stone tools – often found near a water source
- Scarred trees, where sections of bark have been removed to make canoes, containers or shields
- Artefact scatters, quarries and earth mounds
- Ceremonial places such as bora rings and stone circles.

## Why protect cultural sites?

- Aboriginal people know that connection to country, especially cultural sites, plays an important role in their health and wellbeing. Construction projects, industrial developments and other activities that disturb the landscape can damage or harm places of cultural significance.
- Cutting down a scarred tree or digging into sacred ground may disturb the Spirit Ancestors, and this may have consequences both for the person causing the disturbance, and for the Aboriginal people who are custodians for that place.
- Many cultural sites have been found in the Murweh region and there are likely many more yet to be discovered.



*Stencilled hand prints with white ochre  
from thousands of years ago*



*Spirit nets, stencilled in red ochre. Bidjara people believe the net keeps the bad spirits away*

## What to do if you find a cultural site or artefact

Please inform the Cultural Heritage Unit (DSDSATSIP), who will provide contact details of the appropriate Traditional Owners or tell you what you need to do in any of the following circumstances:

- If you think you've found an Aboriginal cultural heritage place or object on any public or private land
- If you are given cultural material such as stone tools, spears or other objects
- If you are aware of cultural material being disturbed
- If you want to excavate, clear land or carry out an activity that may harm a cultural site

If you discover a cultural site and have the available technology, please record the GPS coordinates and email these to the address on the back page of this booklet.





*Markings showing tools used on a scar tree*



*Rock wells were constructed by First Nations Peoples to catch rain water*

## Dos and Donts

- Please explore the Murweh Shire's well-travelled paths that Aboriginal people have walked for thousands of years. But remember to tread gently and respect our sacred ground.
  - If you discover Aboriginal skeletal remains, or remains that could be human, contact the Queensland Police Service. If the remains are established as pre-colonisation, the police will inform the Traditional Owners.
  - Please don't pick up or remove cultural material such as stone tools. Often where something was made or left by Aboriginal people thousands of years ago is as important as the artefact itself.
  - Don't disturb cultural sites by walking or driving over them, and please leave scarred trees alone.
  - Respect the confidentiality of sites, places or other information given to you by Aboriginal people.
  - When in doubt, please ask. DSDSATSIP can direct you to the appropriate people and answer questions about Aboriginal heritage, sites and places.
- \* Contact details for DSDSATSIP, local Traditional Owners and Charleville Police are listed on the back page of this booklet.



*Quinine tree used for medicine*



*Wild lime tree: the sap is sweet and used as a chewy lolly*

## Law and lore

All Aboriginal objects and places, including sites on freehold land, have legal protection under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003. The Act is administered by the Department of Seniors, Disabilities Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DSDSATSIP), which provides a series of fact sheets and duty of care guidelines to help people understand their obligations. Contact details and a QR Code for more detailed information are listed on the back page of this booklet.

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) understands that Cultural heritage is a lived spirituality that shapes identity and is fundamental to the wellbeing of people and communities.

Traditional Aboriginal lore teaches that many of these sites were originally made by the Spirit Ancestors, making them as old as there have been people on the Australian continent. Under Aboriginal lore and culture, there are consequences for breaking the obligation to care for Country.



## To find out more

### **DSDSATSIP Cultural Heritage Unit**

Phone 1300 378 401

Email [cultural.heritage@dldsatsip.qld.gov.au](mailto:cultural.heritage@dldsatsip.qld.gov.au)

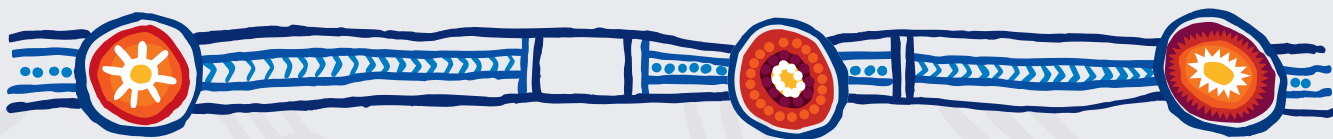
### **Charleville Police**

Phone 07 4650 5500

### **Murweh Shire Council**

Phone 07 4656 8355





Buduroo buduroo –  
 Bidjara gumbi nulkamony  
 murdie-ingeel – gumbies  
 murdies, wadjagins, withoos,  
 gundoos – yumba

Translation:

To the spirit of our ancestors – Bidjara  
 woman talking Bidjara language – to black  
 women, black men, white women, white  
 men and all children – this is home.

Bidjara language contributed by Keelen  
 Mailman, Bidjara Elder



**SQRH**  
 Southern Queensland  
 Rural Health



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 Government**