



SUBMERGED CULTURAL HERITAGE

Woodside Energy

Daniel Thomas | 11 October 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The management of cultural heritage, and particularly Indigenous cultural heritage in Australia has been an increasing area of interest for media, activists and regulators alike.

Modern heritage management requires that projects not only minimise impacts to the fabric of sites and objects, but also to the values of those sites and objects and the broader landscape.

Indigenous cultural heritage also has significance to the Traditional Custodians of land and water across Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have cultural obligations to protect Land and Sea Country, including heritage sites.

Heritage management may be a health and safety consideration for projects in Australia.

State and federal legislation sets a standard of heritage protection, including through the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*, *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, and *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018*.



SUBMERGED INDIGENOUS HERITAGE



It is understood that traditions in many parts of Australia trace Indigenous occupation of the continent back to the creation of the world.

Archaeological evidence confirms that Australia has been occupied for at least 65,000 years, and scientific consensus holds that the first arrivals would have occurred around this time on the north west coast from Asia.

Scientific evidence indicates sea levels have changed dramatically over this time, and would have been about 125m lower during the Last Glacial Maximum 15-25,000 years ago. It is understood that a third of this land mass is now submerged, but would have been utilised by Indigenous People.

It is understood that sea levels rose to their current levels by around 7,000 years ago, inundating vast areas of land. This sea-level rise has been noted by some researchers to be recorded in song and stories from across the continent.

The potential for this submerged landscape to hold evidence of human activity from this time has only begun to be investigated.

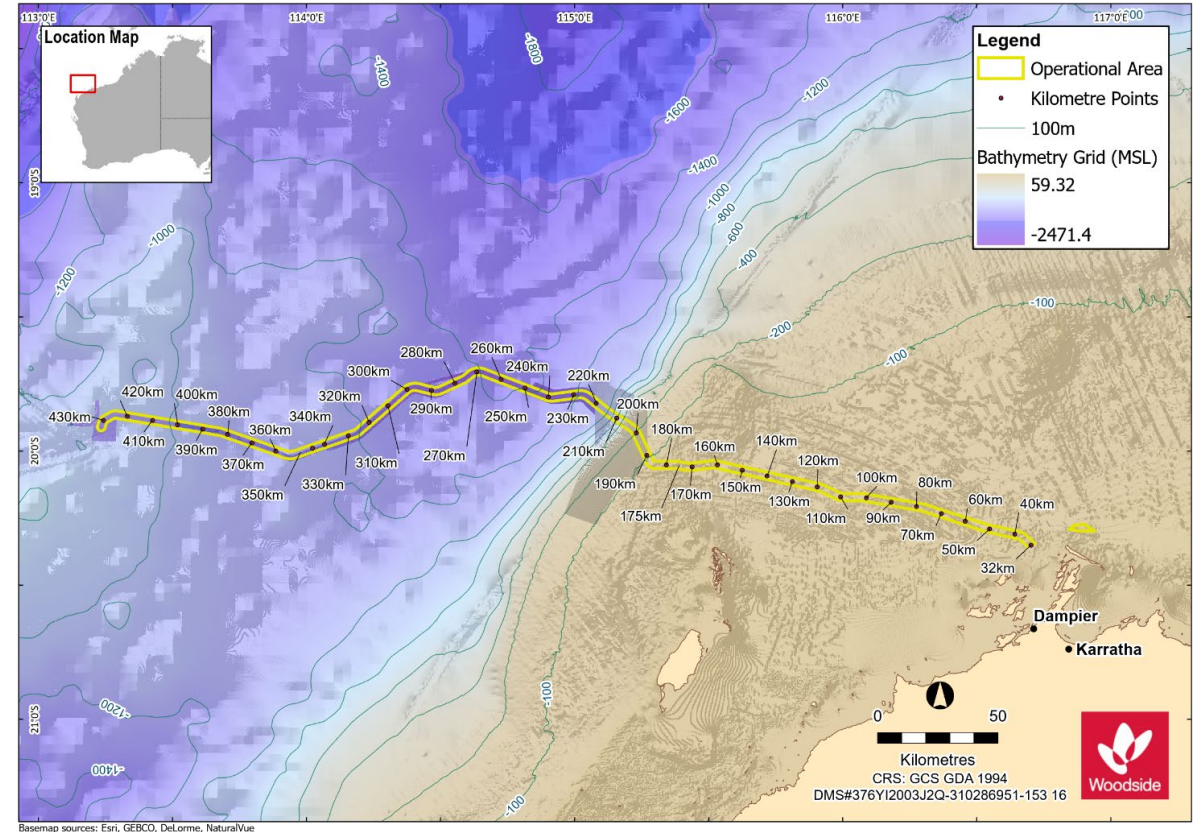
THE SCARBOROUGH PROJECT

The Scarborough field is located in the Carnarvon Basin, approximately 375 km off the coast of Western Australia

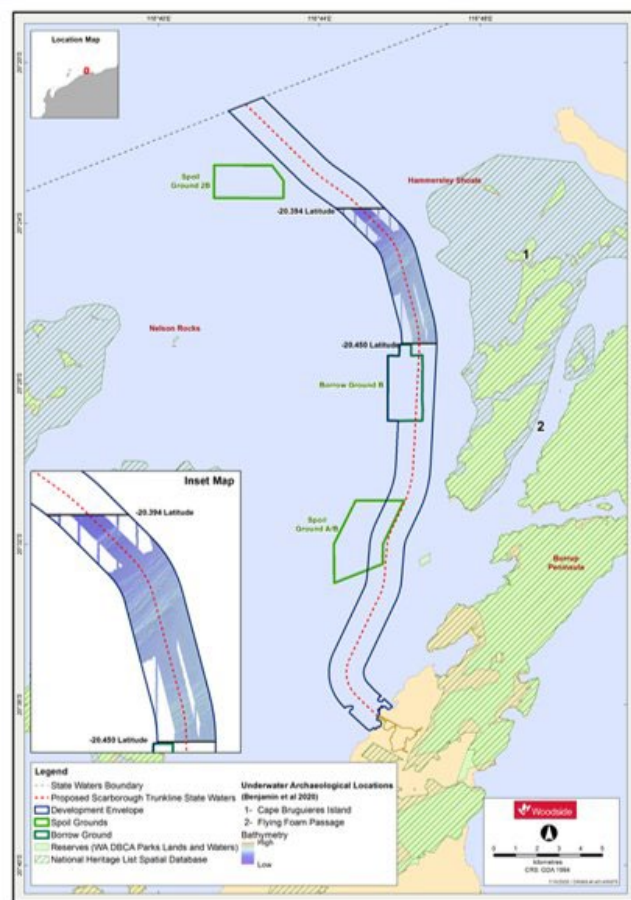
The Scarborough gas resource will be developed through new offshore facilities connected by an approximately 430 km pipeline to a second LNG train at the existing Pluto LNG onshore facility at Murujuga.

Development of Scarborough will include the installation of a floating production unit with eight wells drilled in the initial phase and thirteen wells drilled over the life of the Scarborough field, with all wells tied back to a semi-submersible floating production unit (FPU) moored in 950 m of water close to the Scarborough field

Gas from the Scarborough field will be processed primarily through Pluto Train 2, with some quantities processed through the existing Pluto Train 1.



PREVIOUS RESEARCH



For a long time it has been widely accepted that the now submerged landscape was inhabited by Aboriginal people—the questions was whether any heritage sites would have survived.

Researchers have been looking for evidence of human occupation on the continental shelf for decades.

In 2019 the Deep History of Sea Country project (DHSC) published a paper that investigated the distribution of onshore sites and those most likely to survive inundation. This identified five “highly prospective” landforms that the DHSC then targeted to locate artefacts in the waters of Murujuga.

In July 2020 they published the discovery of the first underwater Indigenous archaeological sites found anywhere in Australia—two sheltered locations at Cape Bruguère (1) and in Flying Foam Passage (2).

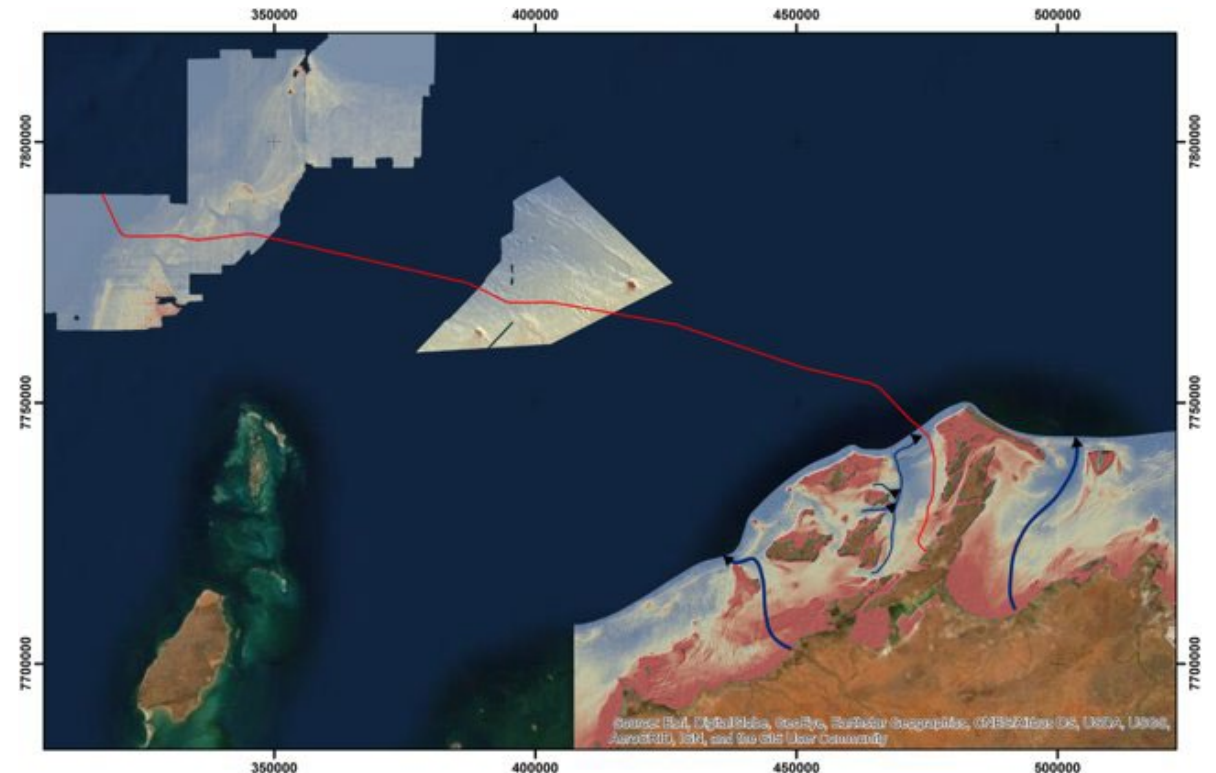
PREDICTIVE MODELLING

Woodside commissioned researchers from the DHSC project to assess areas of archaeological prospectivity along the Scarborough project route.

The research project included Woodside, UWA and MAC in completing a number of components:

- Using existing Woodside geotechnical and bathymetric data to understand the now submerged landscape.
- Using on-shore heritage records and preservation conditions to create a model of where heritage is likely.
- Carbon and uranium dating of Woodside's existing cores was combined with known sea level changes to understand the age of the landscape.

This assessment concluded that the likelihood of impacts to submerged heritage were "low-to-nil" and that the pipeline followed the preferred route through Mermaid Sound to minimize potential impacts.



SIDE SCAN SONAR



Traditional Custodians requested that an underwater archaeologist review the available Side Scan Sonar data from earlier engineering assessments for any evidence of cultural materials—particularly stone arrangements and fish traps.

High resolution side scan sonar is regularly used in maritime archaeology to identify shipwrecks.

Aside from natural features and known infrastructure, the assessment noted “deep, potential catch points on either side of a ridge of calcarenite outcropping. These catch points are areas where Aboriginal artefacts could have been trapped in situ or redeposited during erosion of ridgeline habitation sites.”

Dredging in these areas has been minimised.

The report concluded that “Apart from the Pluto pipeline, no other anomalies of potential cultural origin were detected in the SSS data. No indication of stone structures such as fish traps, or hut foundations could be detected in the inner reef, middle shelf or outer shelf areas.”

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