



Backlash at sacred site cull

| Tom Zaubmayr

Deregistration of sacred sites has been thrust back into the spotlight after 23 mythological and ceremonial sites registered by Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation were said to have been deregistered under the current State Government.

The numbers are part of a new report by UWA archaeologists Joe Dortch and Tom Sapienza revealing 83 WA sites, many seen as important for indigenous lore and culture, were cut from the register.

But Aboriginal Affairs Minister Peter Collier dismissed the study, stating it was one of a number of reports thriving on uncertainty in the Aboriginal Heritage system.

"The report ... appears to be designed to once again oppose the Government's proposed amendments to the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972," Mr Collier said.

"Since 2011, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs has been actively progressing administrative reforms aimed at improving and clarifying information about Aboriginal heritage sites and places."

YMAC chief executive Simon Hawkins said the requirement for a sacred site to be devoted to a religious use rather than a place subject to mythological story, song or belief was the point of contention.

"Anyone familiar with the reasons why a sacred site may be

significant (anthropologists, and Aboriginal people themselves) immediately saw this as problematic," he said.

Sites under YMAC's name to be deregistered include places at Eramurra and Du Boulay creeks, and artefact and midden scatter at Mt Rough.

Nyimili, in the Shire of Ashburton and a highly significant site for the Yinhawangka people, was also deregistered.

Mr Hawkins said YMAC had written to the department regarding one of their deregistered sites after the WA Supreme Court ruled in April the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee had misconstrued the term "sacred site", but was yet to receive a response.

Report co-author Mr Dortch said the pair undertook the study because of concerns about detrimental changes to Aboriginal heritage.

"The Heritage Act is 40 years old and needed reform; a lot of it was quite complex and mining companies were understandably frustrated," he said. "But this was a reform backwards."

"We need to maintain protection but make it easier for companies to do their work, but what has happened is it is being made easier for companies to work without maintaining protection of these sites."

Greens MP Robin Chapple said he doubted any of the 14,000 site status changes since 2010 had been given proper consideration.