

Good afternoon/evening Chair and Senators.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which I am speaking to you from today, the Murrumburr people of Kakadu, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

My name is Ricky Archer. I am a proud Djungan man from the Western Tablelands region of North Queensland and I was appointed to the office of Director of National Parks back in November 2023.

Since then, I have been fortunate to visit many of the iconic places we manage in partnership with Traditional Owners, regional and island communities, and met the passionate and dedicated staff, for whom caring for land and sea Country is more than just a job.

As part of my commitment as Director of National Parks and the commitment of Parks Australia, to protect and preserve Indigenous sacred sites, I want to inform the Committee that I will be pleading guilty to the criminal proceedings relating to the Gunlom walking track, brought by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) against the Director of National Parks in the Local Court of the Northern Territory.

I acknowledge that the trackwork at Gunlom Falls, which was undertaken in 2019 before my tenure in the role, caused great distress and upset to the Jawoyn Traditional Owners of the site. I express my deep and sincere apologies to Traditional Owners for the wrongs of the past.

Growing up as a Djungan man, I have an embedded cultural obligation or responsibility to look after our country, look after our culture, and look after our people. This is part of my being, so I will apply this mindset to my role of DNP, and to strengthen the way Parks Australia manages and protects cultural heritage on our parks estate.

Our focus now is working with Traditional Owners, the Northern Land Council, and the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority on the next steps in relation to the Gunlom site. This includes obtaining an Authority Certificate from AAPA for continued use of the site and re-opening, with the support of the Traditional Owners.

The protection of sacred sites and cultural heritage is always at the heart of our work and a priority. I am committed, as are each of my staff, to working in partnership with Traditional Owners to manage and protect the cultural and natural values of the special places we are entrusted to manage so that this will not happen again.
Thank you.