All landscapes contain the imprint of human use. The way perceptions, beliefs, stories, experiences and practices give shape, form and meaning to the landscape is termed a cultural landscape (ACH 1998).

An Aboriginal cultural landscape is ‘a place or area valued by an Aboriginal group (or groups) because of their long and complex relationship with that land. It expresses their unity with the natural and spiritual environment. It embodies their traditional knowledge of spirits, places, land uses, and ecology. Material remains of the association may be prominent, but will often be minimal or absent’ (Buggey 1999).

The landscape scale of cultural heritage is similar to the concept of ‘whole-of-landscape’ in ecosystem conservation – just as there is connectivity between all parts of natural ecosystems (e.g. plants, animals, soils and water) there is connectivity between cultural objects and places through past human behaviour patterns. The cultural landscape concept emphasises the landscape-scale of history and the connectivity between people, places and heritage items. It recognises that the present landscape is the product of long-term and complex relationships between people and the environment.

Aboriginal cultural landscapes are comprised of:

1. Significant biodiversity and a diverse range of ecological systems and associations, all of which contributed to the continuing existence of Aboriginal peoples in the region over many thousands of years, and which are valued in different ways by Aboriginal communities today.

2. Material remains of this continuing occupation in the form of a diverse array of Aboriginal sites and places known to the Aboriginal communities, some of which will be recorded on the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water’s Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System.

3. Extensive historical records from 1788 through to today which record observations of Aboriginal people and lifestyles, wars, massacres, social and cultural events, population census, social interactions, language etc, and which influence Aboriginal community values today.

4. An Aboriginal population made up of people who have traditional association and knowledge of the region, as well as others who live, work and play within the region, all of whom may attribute various values with the area, derived from the distant and recent past, through to the present day.
For Aboriginal people, the significance of individual landscape features is derived from their interrelatedness within the cultural landscape. This means features cannot be assessed in isolation and any assessment must consider the feature and its associations in a holistic manner. This may require a range of assessment methods and will always require the close involvement and participation of Aboriginal people. By consulting with Aboriginal people and using the concept of cultural landscapes, the story behind the features can be told which demonstrates the associations that may exist between Aboriginal objects and other features within the landscape.

References
