The Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground Project  
Stage 1

A joint project between the Rottnest Island Authority and IES enviro-scapes

Established in January 2010, IES enviro-scapes is owned and managed by Karen Jacobs and Cedric Jacobs with Karen responsible for the day-to-day operations.

Over the past 5 years IES has developed significant capability and capacity to provide services to a wide range of clients including large national and multinational corporations such as Holcim Australia, the Golden Group, St John of God Hospitals, Brookfield Multiplex and McConnell Dowell.

IES operates in a number of areas with a core focus on the Environment and Aboriginal Heritage.

Our services area include:

1. Full service solutions for ‘Section 18 of the Aboriginal Heritage Act’ matters
2. Environmental Compliance Management
3. Landscaping - hard and soft
4. Cross Cultural Awareness Workshops
5. Employment development and labour hire

Our Mission
Deliver high quality project outcomes for clients whilst creating economic opportunities and employment for Aboriginal people.

Karen Jacobs
Karen is a bloodline descendant and a traditional owner of Whadjuk Country. Her primary focus is on developing and encouraging Aboriginal involvement in enterprise and business opportunities. She has an extensive background in cultural heritage, tourism and horticulture and specialises in environmental projects: re-vegetation, rehabilitation and carbon abatement, arboriculture and natural habitats.

Cedric Jacobs
Cedric is a bloodline descendant and a traditional owner of Whadjuk Country.

A highly respected Aboriginal man with over 40 years’ experience in business and Aboriginal affairs, Cedric’s qualifications including a diploma in Agriculture, Diploma in Human Behaviour and a tertiary qualification in English.

Cedric is formally a teacher and an ordained minister of the Uniting Church. He is the current Chairperson of the Perth Noongar Economic Foundation and Chairperson of the Sovereign Whadjuk Management Association Inc.

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The Aboriginal History of Wadjemup

Known to local Aboriginal people as Wadjemup, Rottnest Island is believed to be a place of spirits and is of significance to Aboriginal communities.

Remains of tools demonstrating early Aboriginal occupation have been found at a number of sites on Wadjemup. Some date as far back as 20,000 to 30,000 years ago when the Island was still joined to the Western Australian mainland.

Approximately 7,000 years ago Wadjemup was separated from the mainland and this has been attributed to continuous sea level rise.

In 1838 the Perth Gazette reported on plans to establish a prison on Rottnest Island. Over the next 93 years there was a steady flow of Aboriginal prisoners who were sentenced to Rottnest. Some of these men would serve multiple sentences and some would never return to their homelands.

Almost 4,000 Aboriginal men and boys from all over Western Australia were exiled on the Island and it is believed around 370 Aboriginal men were buried in unmarked graves on Wadjemup during the time the Rottnest Island Aboriginal Establishment was in operation.

Stage 1 of the Burial Ground Project

Stage 1 includes:
- The construction of an 880m long pathway around the Burial Ground.
- A series of three stabilised rammed earth ‘entry’ walls installed at entry points to the site to direct access surrounding the burial ground itself. (These walls will have recesses ready for interpretation panels).
- Installation of bike racks at entry points to the path ways.
- Planting of vegetation to stabilise embankments

The IES Team

After a competitive tender process an Aboriginal company was awarded the contract to complete stage one of the burial ground project. The project is particular significant to IES Enviro-scapes, with bloodline connection to country, they understand the sensitivities of the project as a major step towards reconciliation for the Island.

The team consists of:
- Overall Responsibility and Community Liaison – Karen Jacobs, Managing Director.
- Construction Team - 1 Environmental Engineer, 1 Construction Engineer and 6 labourers.
- Administration Team – 1 Contract Manager, 1 Administration Officer.
- Monitors – Whadjuk Elders/Traditional Owners
- Other specialist subcontractors as required.

The Rottnest Island Authority

The RIA recognises the cultural significance and sad history that Wadjemup holds for Aboriginal people and therefore its position of responsibility to ensure the Island is both appropriately managed and contributes towards economic and cultural opportunities for Aboriginal people.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs currently has 17 registered sites, which are culturally significant to Aboriginal peoples on Wadjemup. These sites are protected under provisions of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972.

Culturally significant sites are spread across the entire Island and include Dreaming sites, archaeological sites, and the burial ground.

[Diagram of Wadjemup Burial Ground Site plan 2015]