



# WET TROPICS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Your Ref: [REDACTED]

Our Ref: [REDACTED]

14 June 2012

Australian Heritage Strategy Project team  
Heritage Strategies  
Heritage and Wildlife Division  
Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities  
GPO Box 787  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam

## **Submission – Australian Heritage Strategy**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission into the public consultation paper prepared in support of the Australian Heritage Strategy.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority is a Queensland statutory authority established to ensure that Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention in relation to the wet tropics is met. Reporting to a Ministerial Council comprising Queensland and Australian Government ministers, the Authority has a wide range of regulatory, planning, communications and reporting functions. The Authority's extensive experience in the administration of heritage policy, especially as it relates to World Heritage, informs the attached submission.

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Yours sincerely

**Andrew Maclean**  
Executive Director

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**Wet Tropics Management Authority**  
**Submission to the Australian Heritage Strategy public consultation paper**

**Summary Recommendations**

- Heritage places, especially those listed as World or National Heritage, require systems of governance and management that reflect the distinctive nature and significance of the place.
- The Commonwealth must ensure it has a prominent role in the management of World Heritage properties and must take steps to reverse the decline in resources available for World Heritage policy development, investment and administration.
- States with responsibility for World Heritage places must ensure that World Heritage listing is a significant influence in resource allocation and that management standards and systems reflect the significance of the place.
- Greater attention must be given to implementing the complementary Commonwealth and State inputs and roles in the regulation and management of natural World Heritage that were established under the recently reviewed Australian World Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement to ensure the full suite of Australia's World Heritage convention obligations are fulfilled.
- State and local governments should establish strategic heritage conservation frameworks through regulatory and planning mechanisms that complement the national level protections afforded by the EPBC Act.
- National guidelines and standards for World and National Heritage places would assist in ensuring that presentation, marketing and interpretation is consistent and commensurate with the status of the place.
- The concept of giving heritage places a function in the life of the community should be extended from World Heritage to all relevant heritage places as a means of ensuring continuing community support for heritage conservation and to ensure management is oriented towards the needs and interests of the community.

**Governance and management of heritage places**

Identification and listing of a place is important but of itself, insufficient. Once a place is listed, an adequate system of management must be implemented and the listing proponents must accept responsibility for ensuring that this is in place and well supported.

The system of management should be commensurate with the significance of the listing (on a scale from World to local significance), the nature of the place and its management needs. For example, it is reasonable to expect that, having nominated a place as being of World Heritage significance, Australia should be able to demonstrate distinctive world-class systems of governance and management of the place that will ensure World Heritage Convention obligations can be honoured.

The Authority is concerned to observe situations where heritage listing makes little apparent difference to the standard of protection, conservation or presentation of a newly listed place. This diminishes the value the community might expect to derive from listing the place and risks debasing the heritage listing.

### **Intergovernmental coordination**

Commonwealth support, coordinated with the States and supported by local government is critical for the future of Australian World Heritage properties.

The recently revised World Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement provides a useful framework for cooperation and coordination between the States and the Commonwealth in relation to World Heritage. However, the Authority is concerned that key institutions that the Agreement is built around are in decline. For example, at the behest of COAG, property specific Ministerial Councils were abolished on the argument that the Environment and Heritage Protection Council (EPHC) provided suitable forum for coordination supported by advice from the newly established Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC). However, subsequent COAG reforms led to the abolition of EPHC itself and executive and logistical support for the effective functioning of AWHAC is insufficient to permit it to have an influential role. World Heritage policy coordination no longer has the intergovernmental support it merits.

Very significant reductions in resources for heritage management within SEWPAC over the last couple of years is further evidence of declining Commonwealth commitment to maintaining effective capacity for its proper role in World Heritage conservation and management. Declining Commonwealth leadership in relation to World Heritage means that much of its interaction with properties is now defensive, with emphasis on utilising powers under the EPBC Act to ensure protection of property values against impacts of proposed development.

On the other hand, the States, who are the on-ground managers of many of the natural-values World Heritage properties, tend to manage listed places consistent with their underlying status as a national park or similar conservation reserve. State resourcing for management of protected areas generally is also highly limited and there is little apparent evidence that World Heritage status of particular parks having much influence in the allocation of resources to those parks.

Under this arrangement, for many listed places, significant aspects of the World Heritage Convention fall through the gaps. These relate primarily to the standards of conservation achieved, relative to other non-listed landscapes; standards of presentation, including recognition of the World Heritage status of places; and possibly most significantly, the obligation of State parties to the convention to give places a function in the life of the community.

### **Heritage protection regulations**

Heritage places must be protected under an effective regulatory regime that is implemented in ways that maintain the continuing support of communities. The national regulatory framework afforded by the EPHC Act is vital and generally effective but should be supported by an appropriate complementary framework of state and local laws. It would be a shame if communities came to see World and



National Heritage places only as a source of Commonwealth-imposed obstacles to development of regional infrastructure.

While retaining the EPBC Act as a key framework, proactive regional solutions administered through State law or planning systems might provide for effective, locally administered protection, greater certainty for developers and in turn, greater support for the positive values of heritage places. Although not formally coordinated, the EPBC Act operating in concert with the Wet Tropics Management Plan and the specific recognition of Wet Tropics World Heritage Area values in the FNQ2031 Regional Plan is possibly an example of a transferable approach. The strategic assessment process underway for the Great Barrier Reef may also provide clues to an approach to heritage conservation that could be applied more widely.

### **Presentation and interpretation**

Presentation and interpretation heritage is a vital process for improving community understanding of heritage values and from this, support for protection and management.

The Authority observes wide disparities in the standard of presentation, identification and interpretation of World and National Heritage properties. In some cases, the heritage status of a property is prominently communicated. In other cases, it is barely acknowledged. In almost all circumstances, the relevant heritage brand must compete with others designating the status, management or ownership of the place. While avoiding a bland uniformity, there is a need to establish and support national guidelines and standards for identification, presentation and interpretation of these key heritage places as a means of maintaining elevated attention to their values.

### **Function in the life of the community**

State parties are obliged by the World Heritage Convention to adopt policies to give World Heritage places a 'function in the life of the community'. The logic behind this principle extends to all heritage places. Heritage management agencies should make every effort achieve this to ensure community engagement with the place and its management is strong and to ensure an appropriate flow of benefits to relevant communities. Celebration of the heritage status of places is vital lest heritage be seen only as a problem or regulatory impediment.

Some indicators of a place having a function in the life of the community include the extent to which it is used or visited, its use in research and education, the extent to which it is valued as a basis for regional tourism, the extent to which it supports the expression of Indigenous rights and culture, the extent to which communities can make contributions to and have influence over management of the place.

Making progress against these indicators requires appropriate place-based systems of governance and management, that management agencies are oriented to and engaged with the community and that sufficient resources are available to support programs.