



TEMPLATE FOR INPUT INTO THE AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY

Overview

This template should be used to provide comments on the design of the Australian Heritage Strategy.

Contact Details

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Questions

Please add your comments for some or all of the three questions below. If you have other information you wish to provide, please add this in the other comments field.

1. What do you think are the key elements of the Commonwealth's role in heritage?

The Commonwealth must play a continuing role in relation to World Heritage and National Heritage places. This requires active, leadership roles in at least:

- Policy, planning and regulation in national and international contexts
- Identifying, listing and promoting heritage places
- Maintaining integrity in heritage listing processes – for World and National heritage at least
- Ensuring, either directly or through partnerships, that appropriate expertise is available to support heritage conservation and management
- Ensuring effective governance systems are established for each listed place
- Ensuring establishment and effective implementation of national coordination of heritage management systems
- Supporting World and National heritage place management through provision of funding

Except for Commonwealth-managed places, the Commonwealth will need to build fit for purpose collaborative management arrangements with the owners or managers of listed heritage places. This is often private or institutional owners of places with historic heritage, State governments for places with natural heritage values and Traditional Owners where Indigenous cultural heritage is a key value. Accordingly, the Commonwealth will need to adopt a collaborative and brokering approach.

2. What new cooperative models could be explored to open up opportunities for heritage protection?



The Wet Tropics Management Authority believes that, whether it is a new approach or not, there is a strong argument for establishing and supporting strong, place-based systems of governance for World and National heritage places (or logical aggregations of heritage places) that engages the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders in the place. This view is supported by the *Cairns Communique* developed by the Australian Committee for IUCN (see http://aciucn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/38_Communique2.pdf - clause 49). Governance systems also need to ensure that there is executive delivery capacity commensurate with the scale and complexity of the place. Advisory committees with limited authority over heritage place owners and managers and no capacity to implement anything on their own behalf are not sufficient.

A place-based approach helps to ensure that heritage places are the locus for cooperative protection and management arrangements; research and monitoring; education and communications; and partnerships with tourism and other relevant sectors. A place-based approach is likely the best mechanism for ensuring culturally appropriate engagement of Traditional Owners where this is relevant. It is also likely to be the best mechanism for ensuring heritage places build a function in the life of the community and it helps to diminish any sense that World or National Heritage listing is something imposed by the Commonwealth on regional communities.

In relation to other ways of ‘opening up opportunities for heritage protection’, the Authority is interested in better capitalising on the World Heritage status of the Wet Tropics by developing projects in partnership with Traditional Owners and others in the community that could attract investment from the private sector (be it philanthropic or corporate sponsorship). The Authority is in the preliminary stages of project development and partnership development. World Heritage is a globally significant brand but Australia has perhaps not yet capitalised on the opportunities the brand creates through corporate partnerships. Note, however the efforts the World Heritage Centre has made to secure corporate partnerships: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/partners/>. A similar effort might be made at a national scale.

The Authority’s experience is that research institutions are normally eager to align research effort to the needs of place managers. Place managers can assist by developing research and monitoring strategies that provide useful guidance. Establishment of a grants system would create further stimulus and might be achieved on a cost-neutral basis by allocating a proportion of the NERP program (or any successor) to explicitly address Commonwealth research needs for national and World heritage.

The Authority notes that the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC) was established to, *inter alia*, facilitate communication and collaboration with the Commonwealth and among World Heritage properties. The original focus for AWHAC’s advice has been abolished requiring renewal and clarification of AWHAC’s advisory mandate and focus. Notwithstanding the issue of its advisory role, AWHAC serves a useful purpose in information sharing and collaboration between WH properties and the Commonwealth and should continue to be supported in some form at least.



The Authority is concerned that the AWHAC model in focussing at the advisory committee level tends to bypass the executive management functions of the various World Heritage properties, meaning that an important collaborative opportunity is lost. More needs to be done to harness the interest, expertise and collaboration of State government World Heritage managers. In the first instance, this requires re-engagement at the Ministerial level and reinvigoration of the national World Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement.

3. How can communities engage more effectively in the management of heritage places?

At the risk of repeating the point above, communities are much more likely to engage in management of heritage places if this engagement is with a local or regional scale entity with responsibility for the place.

Place managers, with support from the Commonwealth, need to provide diverse opportunities for engagement. These might include participation in the governance and planning system for the place, and voluntary contributions to conservation programs and information and interpretation activities. Place managers need to also ensure sufficient provision of information and interpretation about the heritage place to promote wide understanding and through that, support for the conservation of the place.

Schools are a particularly valuable focus for engagement, involving not just the students but their families and the school community. The Reef Guardians project delivered by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is a terrific example that might be emulated in various ways at other heritage places.

Heritage conservation and management projects provide a very good focus for community engagement. For example, the Authority's 'Making Connections' project aimed at restoring connectivity on the Atherton Tablelands engaged diverse members of the community and was nationally recognised for its engagement successes. The foundation for this engagement was project funding under the Caring for Our Country program, emphasising the fundamental need for continuing Commonwealth support for heritage conservation projects.

The heritage strategy should include reference to the importance of appropriate process for engagement of Traditional Owners in listing processes for National and World Heritage. Engagement of Traditional Owners is very important wherever landscapes are under consideration for listing, whether for Indigenous cultural values or not. Engagement needs to be established very early in the listing process. The recent experience of National Heritage listing the cultural heritage values of the Wet Tropics demonstrates the importance of clear communication about the purpose and implications of listing and of clarifying management responsibility for the listed values following listing. Listing of Indigenous cultural values should establish a system of management that fully involves the traditional custodians; it is not an end in itself.

Heritage is often of considerable interest to tourists and may create a major attraction for visitors to a place and its region. With support from the Commonwealth, place managers should build



strong connections with the tourism industry as important partners in communication and interpretation and to further strengthen regional community support for effective management of heritage listed places. These partnerships provide an important foundation for tourism industry collaboration in conservation programs.

Other comments

A key point that the heritage strategy should pursue is that heritage places represent the 'best of the best' so merit a correspondingly high standard of management. A business as usual approach means that listing might deliver little more than a plaque on a wall, accompanied only by an additional regulatory burden on property managers and regional communities. While regulatory protections are very important, listing should also yield the highest standards of governance and management and deliver positive opportunities to the place and its stakeholders.

The observations of the recent World Heritage Committee monitoring mission to the Great Barrier Reef are instructive. It commented:

...it is not clear whether all of the aspects that make up the OUV of the property are being considered, nor is the approach consistent in considering them and therefore it is also not considered transparent, nor effective

and recommended:

Ensure the OUV, including integrity of the Great Barrier Reef is a clearly defined and central element within the protection and management system for the property as well as the catchments and ecosystems that surround it...

In effect, the mission found that the outstanding universal value of the reef – that is, the fundamental basis for its listing as a World Heritage Area – had not received sufficient attention in management. Numerous other natural heritage places in Australia are, like the reef, reserved as some form of conservation tenure and are managed as part of the State or Commonwealth national parks program. The lesson from the reef is that this approach does not necessarily address the heritage values of the place or the goals of the World Heritage Convention which must be an explicit focus of management attention. The heritage strategy is an ideal opportunity to respond to this.