Template FOR INPUT INTO THE

**AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY**

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| Overview  This template should be used to provide comments on the content of the Australian Heritage Strategy. | |
| Contact Details | |
| **Name of Organisation:** | **Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee** |
| **Name of Author:** | **Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee Members** |
| **Date:** | **7 June 2014** |
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| Questions  Please add your comments for some or all of the questions provided with the Strategy’s three high level themes below. If you have other information you wish to provide, please add this in the “Other comments” field. | |
| 1. **Improve National Leadership**   What are the most important things the Australian Government should be doing to offer leadership in heritage?  How can the Australian Government provide guidance and support for our national heritage—while still empowering other government, industry and community members to take responsibility and get involved?  What priority areas are important to you, your organisation or group?  What practical actions would you suggest to improve national heritage leadership? | |
| AWHAC notes that the first program under this theme is "Improved Support for Australia's Iconic World Heritage Sites". This is an important and appropriate ambition. It is therefore disappointing that the Strategy makes no mention of AWHAC itself, nor of the Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network (AWHIN). AWHAC submits that the Strategy should renew the mandate of and express strong ongoing support for both AWHAC and AWHIN as important and legitimate sources of the national leadership called for in the Strategy.  AWHAC also requests that the proposed actions in relation to this program should specifically include adoption of the ‘Framework for Best Practice Management of Australian World Heritage Properties’, which is currently in preparation.  While expressing support for the commitments that are presented in the Strategy, AWHAC also recommends that the strategy should also provide a commitment to support all 19 Australian World Heritage properties. In particular, AWHAC recommends that the Strategy should provide a clear commitment for ongoing for funding programs and actions that are directed at supporting State and territory management and Commonwealth compliance with Australia’s World Heritage Convention obligations – for example: recurrent funding of Executive Officers for Australian World Heritage properties.  It would also be reassuring to know that the laudable commitment to provide support to the conservation works on the Port Arthur penitentiary will be complemented by similar levels of commitment to other Australian World Heritage sites in future years.  AWHAC believes that the overall content of the Strategy relating to Indigenous heritage could be strengthened considerably. In this regard, attention is drawn to the findings of the *State of the Environment 2011 Report*. At the very least, AWHAC contends that the Strategy should commit to establishment of a national peak body for Indigenous Heritage, analogous to the regular ‘Heads of Parks’ meeting or the ‘Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand’.  AWHAC considers that Strategy should commit to appropriate processes for engagement of Traditional Owners in the processes leading to listing on the National Heritage List and World Heritage List. Engagement of Traditional Owners is very important wherever landscapes are under consideration for listing, even if the principal rationale for listing relates to natural, rather than Indigenous, values. Such engagement should be established early in the assessment and listing process. Listing of Indigenous cultural values should support systems of management that fully involves the Traditional Owners.  AWHAC notes with interest the proposed actions relating to future World Heritage nominations and advises that the appropriate mechanism for pursuing such nominations, including Cape York Peninsula, Sydney's Royal National Park, and the Queen Victoria Markets in Melbourne, would involve the development of a ‘Tentative List’ to be submitted to the World Heritage Centre, in accordance with Australia's obligations under the *Operational Guidelines to the World Heritage Convention*. The Tentative List should be prepared consultatively and collaboratively, in conjunction with community, environmental, Indigenous and other stakeholder interests, and State and Territory Governments.  AWHAC welcomes the proposed contribution to international heritage standards setting and guidance, but recommends that the Strategy should also commit to best practice domestically, through formal endorsement of relevant principles and standards such as the *Australian Natural Heritage Charter*, the *Ask First* guidelines, *Burra Charter* of Australia ICOMOS and the *Cairns Communiqué*. | |
| 1. **Pursue Innovative Partnerships**   What partnerships are most needed within the heritage sector?  What heritage roles and responsibilities should be led by governments, peak heritage organisations or community groups in the 21st century?  How should resources be shared through heritage partnerships to ensure the greatest return on agreed priorities?  Can you provide examples of successful innovative partnerships you or your organisation have established? | |
| AWHAC notes the Government's proposed ‘one-stop shop’ proposals which will rely on accreditation of State and Territory planning systems to manage environmental assessment and approval processes under the *EPBC Act*. AWHAC submits that delegation of assessment and approval relating to loss of "Outstanding Universal Value" at World Heritage properties would not be appropriate and the Strategy should therefore indicate that these will be excluded from the bilateral agreement process. However, in the event that such delegations proceed, AWHAC advises that the Commonwealth must be satisfied that the States have access to appropriate knowledge and expertise about World Heritage to ensure standards are maintained and Outstanding Universal Value is conserved and transmitted to future generations.  An important initiative for all Australian World Heritage properties is identification of the attributes that contribute to their Outstanding Universal Value. This work can be the cornerstone of collaborative partnerships between managers, researchers, and indigenous and community representatives and can provide benchmarks for management, monitoring, reporting and communication.  AWHAC submits that the Commonwealth should commit to providing support to help Australian World Heritage properties to develop appropriate management plans that will allow bilateral delegated *EPBC Act* decisions to be made effectively, noting that the Act itself obliges the Commonwealth to use its best endeavours to ensure that management plans are in place. Commonwealth support for management plans would also facilitate research, monitoring and evaluation efforts within Australian World Heritage properties.  Many World Heritage properties are threatened by activities on adjacent lands. AWHAC therefore recommends that the Strategy should include a specific action which works towards ensuring that zoning and development controls on land adjacent to World Heritage (and National Heritage) properties are appropriate and act to protect World Heritage (and National Heritage) values.  The Strategy correctly notes that most places on the World Heritage list are in State and Territory jurisdictions, but then proposes very little related action. AWHAC observes that State Governments disengage with World Heritage on the basis that is a Commonwealth matter. There is an urgent need for the Commonwealth to exert its leadership to ensure that State and Territory Governments accord greater priority to meeting World Heritage outcomes; to ensure that relevant State and Territory agencies honour property governance arrangements; and direct State and Territory land and resource management resources to World Heritage outcomes.  The program element relating to building heritage capacity surprisingly does not engage with the looming loss of specialist heritage trade and professional skills, which has previously been identified in an expert report to the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand. AWHAC regards this as a major and urgent issue which should be subject to both commitment and action under this Strategy program.  While recognising the Government’s commitment to the Green Army, AWHAC also seeks recognition in the Strategy of the value and ongoing commitment to existing community-based conservation programs including Landcare, Working on Country and Caring for our Country. AWHAC specifically recommends that the Strategy should extend the benefits of Caring for our Country to all Australian World Heritage properties, including those listed for cultural heritage values.  There is also significant risk posed to heritage values, if the Green Army participants are not adequately trained prior to working at World Heritage properties and/or if they are inadequately supervised. Further, the short-term nature of Green Army projects will likely limit the extent to which participants can develop useful transferable technical or professional skills during their placements or achieve more than superficial heritage conservation benefits. AWHAC recommends that the Government must actively monitor implementation of the Green Army program and progressively adapt it to ensure that it does contribute to heritage outcomes while also providing meaningful skills development for participants.  AWHAC notes the commitment to funding support the Federation of Australian Historical Societies over the next three years. However, it is disappointing that this commitment occurs in a context where grants for volunteer environmental, sustainability and heritage organisations (GVGSHO) have just been discontinued. A number of World Heritage properties directly benefit from the input of these organisations, which will now be diminished. AWHAC suggests that the Government should re-consider the total abolition of the GVESHO program to provide for continued support for voluntary contributions to World Heritage and that the Strategy should at least express a general commitment to support for volunteer environmental, sustainability and heritage organisations.  AWHAC recommends that an additional program stream be added within the ‘Innovative Partnerships’ theme, seeking to pursue greater links with educational institutions, particularly through use of World Heritage properties and places on the National Heritage List, in conjunction with the new national curriculum. This should also be valuably extended to the university sector and the need for co-ordinated and directed research outcomes.  AWHAC strongly supports the inclusion of applied research for World Heritage within the new National Environmental Science Program and suggests that this could be included within the Strategy. | |
| 1. **Enable encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage**   What should the Australian heritage sector be doing to help the Australian community better engage in heritage activities?  How can a shared understanding of our national heritage be developed and best celebrated together?  Do you have any examples of activities that have been successful in promoting local heritage to a broader audience?  What is the role of technology and new media in providing greater community access to heritage? | |
| AWHAC submits that an optimal means of creating incentives and encouragement for heritage conservation would be for the Commonwealth to commit to setting a best-practice example – for World Heritage properties, Commonwealth places on the National Heritage List and, indeed, for all Commonwealth-owned heritage places.  The Commonwealth and States depend heavily in the voluntary contributions of the community to World Heritage governance, conservation programs, education and interpretation and to support regulatory approaches. Communities of place can be an important source of innovation in support of properties. AWHAC notes that World (and other) Heritage places create the most important and relevant locus for engagement programs and submits that these values should be directly supported by the Strategy. The Strategy should also recognise that communities may be motivated by different sets of values than those recognised as Outstanding Universal value and that there are opportunities to work with local groups to understand how such complementary values and interests can be engaged in protecting World Heritage properties.  AWHAC notes that if there is some re-consideration of the timing for celebration of Australia's heritage, this should not occur in the northern ‘wet’ season, as to do so would effectively disenfranchise heritage places in the Top End; neither should it occur on 26 January, Australia Day, as this is a day about which Indigenous and other Australians have diverse and disparate opinions and feelings.  AWHAC considers that effective management of heritage places requires a proactive program of monitoring and evaluation and therefore recommends that the strategy should commit to such a program, using the framework already provided in the *State of the Environment 2011 Report*. | |
| **Other comments** | |
| The Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC) was established under the Australian World Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement to provide advice and support to Ministers with responsibility for World Heritage policy and properties. AWHAC includes nominees representing all Australian World Heritage properties. AWHAC welcomes the preparation of the Strategy and congratulates the Government on this initiative. AWHAC is supportive of the overall strategy vision and the three major themes: National, Leadership, Innovative Partnerships, and Community Engagement. While a number of Australian World Heritage properties will make individual submissions, the AWHAC submission is focused on major cross-cutting matters which affect Australian World Heritage properties. | |