**Comments on “A strategy for Australia’s Heritage”**

I accept the real difficulties in establishing a strategy across such diverse areas but the current document has significant gaps. My concerns stem from a perception that the focus of the document is too narrow, it misses key elements of Australia’s heritage and it does not address issues of maintenance of the distributed, existing heritage collections held in museums, art galleries and herbaria.

The strategy seems to be largely focussed on cultural heritage rather than the natural heritage, even though it is the natural environment which is primarily responsible for making Australia truly unique on a world-wide scale. It is also our flora and fauna, that has evolved in isolation, that makes this continent unique. It is these features and our landscape which collectively attracts overseas tourists to the country and it is somewhat disturbing that it is treated in such a cursory way in this strategy. Hopefully, sooner than later, Australia will begin to appreciate the significance of maintaining our environment; the current strategy seems largely silent or this issue.

It is disappointing that geoconservation and sites of geoheritage significance are not considered in the document. I particularly want to focus my comments on the palaeontological record and sites in Australia that record the evolution of life on this planet. The significance of the Precambrian Ediacaran –aged sites in South Australia, the Devonian Gogo fish faunas in Western Australia, the Triassic aged faunas of Queensland and Tasmania, Lark Quarry in Western Queensland are just some examples. These sites and many others are included in *Australia’s Fossil Heritage; A catalogue of important fossil sites’*, which I would recommend that the writers of this strategy refer to. While this publication has some limitations it provides an important synthesis of information on fossil sites throughout Australia; it is by no means complete.

There has been a systemic failure to develop any kind of uniform national vision in this area and for the protection of palaeontological sites in Australia. I would recommend that the authors compare the approaches of the United Kingdom, European Association for the conservation of geological heritage; and the controls that the Chinese Government have put in place to ensure that fossils of international significance are not lost from the country. There has been theft in Australia from a range of sites, including dinosaur trackways in Queensland and Western Australia, Ediacaran fossils from South Australia, Cambrian invertebrates from Tasmania and fossil bones from sites at Riversleigh to name, but, a few. Unfortunately the movable cultural heritage legislation has not been successful in stopping the export of important geoheritage items from Australia.

The States maintain heritage collections, in museums, art galleries and herbaria. Maintenance of a distributed National collection is not discussed in the Strategy, although I note the rather surprising suggestion to secure on long term loan the Matthew Flinders Map. If the strategy were to secure items of significance for the National Collection I would be supportive, but reference to the Flinders Map, in isolation, just comes across as somewhat ill conceived and naive. It would seem to be more important to see Federal-State government partnerships to ensure that the existing unique heritage collections held in museums are maintained for perpetuity. In the USA, in comparison, it is possible to secure funds to manage and study collections, principally science collections through the National Science Foundation, which is a government agency. It would be helpful if effective partnerships were developed that could progress similar issues at State and Federal levels in Australia.