# Template FOR INPUT INTO THE

**AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY**

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| Overview  Thank you for the opportunity to comment. The responses provided below have been prepared by the Gondwana Rainforests advisory committees, appointed by state and Commonwealth ministers to provide advice on the protection and management of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area (WHA).  The Gondwana Rainforests WHA has been listed as it is recognised as being of outstanding universal value for what it tells us about the development of life on earth and, in particular, the development of Australian landforms and flora and fauna.  One of the key criteria for listing is the rich biodiversity in the World Heritage Area as rainforests contain so many of Australia’s species. This richness of species, combined with spectacular landscapes and fascinating, verdant rainforests make this World Heritage Area a drawcard for regional, national and international tourists alike as recognised through the listing of a section of the WHA in Australia’s Green Cauldron National Landscape.  It is critically important that the unique and threatened species in these rainforests are afforded the best protection possible to support Australia’s agreed commitments under the World Heritage Convention.  Because of the constitutional history of Australia, almost all IUCN Category II national parks in Australia are managed by State and Territory governments. Very few are managed directly by Parks Australia. This, however, is part of Australia’s internal governance. In the public perception, whether for tourism or for general heritage conservation interest, they are all national parks .  Indeed, in this public perception, there is a ranking of natural heritage, as follows. World Heritage is the universally acknowledged top rank or brand, comparable to the Olympics in sport. Various other internationally recognised categories such as Biosphere Reserves, RAMSAR reserves, Geoparks, etc., are ranked second. National parks, which are perceived as a country’s principal national‑scale natural heritage assets, are ranked third, even if they are managed at state or territory level. Other forms of national heritage designation, including other types of conservation reserve, cultural heritage, and national heritage designation applying only within Australia, rank fourth.  The Australian government is the State Party to the World Heritage Convention and other international conventions, and the external affairs power of the Australian Constitution gives it the ability, and hence also the responsibility, to manage World Heritage and other international natural heritage areas effectively. Within the international community, this is perceived as a legal requirement incumbent upon the Australian government, and overriding any political, legal or structural impediments. It is the Australian government’s responsibility to find ways to protect its World Heritage properties, and this includes finding ways to overcome any governance barriers. | |
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| **Date:** | 9 June 2014 |
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| Questions | |
| 1. **Improve National Leadership** | |
| * 1. What are the most important things the Australian Government should be doing to offer leadership in heritage?   There is significant community concern that the Australian Government is missing opportunities to showcase leadership and passing responsibilities to lesser jurisdictions and agents. It is critical that the federal government provides leadership in setting the agenda, including raising community awareness of the value of Australia’s heritage and the value to the community in protecting the national estate. Two aspects deserve comment: positive leadership in recognising the nation’s heritage, and policy changes in relation to environmental impact assessment.   1. **Positive Leadership:** 2. The Australian Government should develop an advertising campaign and extension package around the principle ‘that our natural heritage … provides for the ongoing health of our nation’, consistent with the national anthem, ‘Our land abounds in nature’s gifts of beauty rich and rare’. Ecotourism is growing and has been revitalised in the last decade, and our heritage places are popular destinations. The health-from-heritage message needs positive portrayal, requires a carefully planned and professional media campaign, must be evidence and educationally based, and should be ever mindful of the fact that 90% of tourists come to Australia because of World Class Natural Beauty. 3. **Policy changes in governance associated with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)**   Impacts on natural heritage are commonly assessed by the proponent of development activities. Usually, consultants are employed to make the assessments and compliance agencies that assess the EIA reports are challenged by lack of resources to assess the validity of many proposals. To improve this system, several actions are needed, including:   1. establish a professional body that accredits environmental consultants and is prepared to defend acceptable professional standards; 2. increase and strengthen the use of thresholds (i.e. limits to acceptable change) in monitoring environmental outcomes, by imposing bonds on developers.    1. 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?   Government needs to make it clear to the community that its responsibility towards the environment and natural heritage is based on the principles of Intergenerational Equity, Ecologically Sustainable Development, and the Precautionary Principle.  These principles are international and non-partisan. The implementation that needs to follow from these principles includes that:   * natural resources are valued in the same manner as economic resources, and there is value in developing and promoting economic tools that appropriately value natural heritage as well as the costs and deleterious impacts associated with development activities (e.g. what is the real cost of clean water?); * cumulative impacts are effectively assessed in space and time.   To mobilise the wide community support that exists but may be latent, it is necessary to build a heritage constituency, which means more effective use of education and media. Actions to address this include:   * targeting engagement programs to local communities to facilitate a greater understanding of the aims and intended outcomes of the heritage strategy and heritage conservation more generally; * developing and implementing policy that is aligned with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in relation to effective mechanisms to protect cultural heritage and facilitate greater Aboriginal involvement in the management of their traditional country and the values therein; * formalising relationships with Aboriginal communities and developing policy and management that incorporate the cultural management strategies that were responsible for heritage protection for thousands of years of Aboriginal stewardship.   1. What priority areas are important to you, your organisation or group?   **Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee**  An important tenet for conservation biologists and their students is the prevention of the extinction of species and the decline of populations. Humans are yet to create a species, which are the product of evolution and evolve over hundreds or thousands of generations. Once gone, species cannot be retrieved. Land, on the other hand, can be restored and some forms of pollution minimised, but once a species is gone, it cannot be brought back. Extinction is still forever. Ongoing extinction is the folly that future generations will least forgive us for.  Several tools have been developed to halt and slow down extinction processes while the large-scale, potentially catastrophic issues such as anthropogenic climate change and the cumulative impacts of land clearing are dealt with. The short-term strategies and tools need to be supported and applied (e.g. genome banks, translocations, captive breeding and release, pest eradication and control, assisted propagation, feral-free sanctuaries, etc.).  There would also be benefit in supporting and training the community in surveillance of natural system science. Monitoring ecosystem change on a scale like that of Australia is an immense task and strategies are needed to understand and address this problem.  **Community Advisory Committee**  The Gondwana Rainforests Community Advisory Committee provides advice from a community viewpoint. Stakeholder groups represented include the tourism sector, Aboriginal groups, local government and conservation interests. Committee priorities include ensuring the conservation of the natural values on which the tourism sector depends. The protection of these values is also integral to the responsibilities that Aboriginal people have borne in caring for country for thousands of generations.  What practical actions would you suggest to improve national heritage leadership?  While Australia’s constitutional arrangements require the involvement and cooperation of the states and territories in the management of most World Heritage properties, the Commonwealth is the State Party to the World Heritage Convention and needs to provide leadership in relation to governance, management and funding arrangements.  Under Article 5 of the Convention, Australia committed to a number of specific actions, including: to give its World Heritage properties a function in the life of the community and to establish services for the protection, conservation and presentation of natural and cultural heritage. It would be timely for the federal government to revisit these obligations.  Urgent action is required to address threats to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of Australia’s World Heritage Areas. Critical resources are needed to support strategic planning and adaptive management.  World Heritage is a cross-cutting theme of the World Parks Congress to be held in Sydney from 12–19 November 2014, and World Heritage Areas are being promoted as exemplars of protected area management. Funding is urgently required to support enhanced interpretation and information resources to assist in providing World Heritage with a voice and presence in the community and to meet community expectations of management.  In particular, there needs to be a change of focus from a reactive problem-based approach to emphasise proactive positive action. This might include a re-definition of the mission of core agencies whose approach is arguably prescriptive, judicial and selective. There needs to be more reward for effective environmental management and enhanced co-design of solutions with communities.  There also needs to be recognition that many natural and cultural heritage problems are about the problems caused by people, and that scientists working with managers and communities are needed to develop practical answers. This means support of pure research as the wellspring of innovation as well as applied research in the search for novel solutions. A cost-effective and risk management culture is required.  Opportunities for positive national leadership also arise from issues that have generated widespread international concern. Positive leadership can be immediately afforded through:   * retraction of the application to delist part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, * enhanced protection of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, including from damaging development activities, and * encouragement for the states to review and amend their biodiversity offset policies to counter habitat destruction, as such policies are ineffective in protecting some rare, endangered and vulnerable species and continue to result in net loss. | |
| 1. **Pursue Innovative Partnerships** | |
| * 1. What partnerships are most needed within the heritage sector?   Public–private sector partnerships have been very successful in establishing large reserves, based on funding models of private donation and dollar-for-dollar support between government, non-governmental organisations and industry. The management of these reserves is an ongoing commitment of the non-governmental and private sectors. In many ways some of these reserves are managed without the stringent controls and oversight that occurs on publicly owned and managed reserves. And the management philosophy seems to be very different. A review of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach is warranted so that the national reserve system and conservation industry can continue to grow, flourish and diversify.  A great deal of research into ecology and natural history is conducted through student training and higher degree research programs. Such research is often not fully-funded by government, and some costs are borne by the individuals concerned. This should be redressed with more equitable funding as a basis for these successful win–win partnerships on which so much Australian science is based.  Likewise many community groups, natural history clubs and cultural heritage societies are responsible for critical observations of nature and voluntary work to safeguard the natural and cultural environment. They do this out of interest or as a hobby, but with some financial encouragement via small grants they could be far more effective. For example, the Hunter Bird Observers Club has for over 30 years monitored the RAMSAR wetlands of the Hunter estuary, and have collected the only data on the gradual decline in migratory shore-birds and waders from the northern hemisphere over this time. Public agencies are not involved in such activities.   * 1. What heritage roles and responsibilities should be led by governments, peak heritage organisations or community groups in the 21st century? * Management of the national reserve system (NRS). * Additions to the NRS to improve comprehensive representation in all bioregions. * Identification and management of threats to the conservation of the outstanding universal values of world heritage areas, and more generally, identification and management of the threats to natural and cultural heritage conservation. * Research to mitigate the threats that transcend boundaries and tenures and act at landscape, regional, continental and global scales.   1. How should resources be shared through heritage partnerships to ensure the greatest return on agreed priorities?   As World Heritage listing recognises outstanding universal value and global significance, the resources required to protect these values should be provided by the federal and state and territory governments, through normal channels but with an improved, collaborative, more reliable, transparent and comprehensive program of funding. When Australia agreed to ‘ensure the identification, protection, conservation and presentation of the outstanding universal values of World Heritage Areas, and the property and the transmission of this value to future generations’, the choice was made then to ensure adequate resources for the management of these areas. It is time for government to deliver.  In Australia, as in developed nations more generally, about 10% of total protected area revenue derives from tourism, almost all in the form of individual visitor entry and activity fees. This income is substantially less than the costs of recreation management in the protected area estate. Commercial tourism operations, whether mobile tours or fixed‑site infrastructure, make negative or negligible net financial contributions. They also severely increase the financial liabilities of parks agencies. For public protected areas, the role of private enterprise in conservation of national natural heritage is limited. The most important partnerships are thus between the Australian Government’s agencies and state and territory government agencies.  Partnerships between the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and NGOs and private landholders are also important, but principally outside parks. These partnerships can promote the conservation of natural and cultural heritage through conservation trusts, agreements and covenants on private land, in order to extend heritage conservation beyond the current protected area estate.  Significant concerns have been raised in relation to Aboriginal engagement and the use of the Green Army to address heritage management. There is universal concern about the outcomes for natural and cultural heritage conservation if the Green Army of unskilled workers are employed in jobs where a skilled and knowledgeable workforce is needed. The repeated references to the Green Army in the Strategy also raises concern that it will lead to unemployment among Aboriginal people if the current generation of skilled Aboriginal land and country managers are no longer funded.  From an Indigenous perspective, the Strategy inferred that all Aboriginal people are unskilled and lack the knowledge required to carry out their traditional cultural responsibilities of land management and cultural heritage conservation. The reality is quite the opposite with many Aboriginal people continuing their cultural practices and retaining traditional knowledge whilst also acquiring documented qualifications in the heritage conservation sector. The proposed Green Army undermines these achievements and could place more pressure on World Heritage values, given that the proposed workforce will consist of participants that, in most cases, will lack the qualifications, connectivity to country, cultural guidance and passion for the desired heritage outcomes.  The Green Army proposal is not in the spirit of the UN charter on Indigenous rights as it is basically a forced involvement by Aboriginal people not necessarily with the connectivity to country. In many cases, it will cause conflict between Aboriginal peoples regarding cultural rights and responsibilities and traditional management rights. The scheme does not recognise self-determination principles or cultural identity. What it does achieve is increased unemployment because people currently employed to undertake management works will be replaced by participants forced to work for the dole.  Globally recognised natural and cultural heritage values could become the victim of a work-for-the-dole scheme. From this perspective, the Green Army program is an abrogation of appropriate governance and best-management models, and will lead to inferior heritage outcomes, place pressure on local economies, and reduce further the resilience of marginalised groups, communities and regions.  Instead of the Green Army program of forced labour, efforts should be directed towards co-management agreements and the development of Indigenous Land Use Agreements to form true partnerships and foster greater engagement of Aboriginal people in heritage conservation.   * 1. Can you provide examples of successful innovative partnerships you or your organisation have established?   *Research institution and Local Government* (this includes local councils and regional council environmental organisations). Researchers participate in assessing, reviewing and conducting small research projects that occur at a local and regional scale. These activities help build a strong community and ensure that local actions are based on best-practice science. Another example is a five-year research partnership with the Sydney Olympic Park Authority. This was in the form of a dollar-for-dollar research grant from the Australian Government.  *Researchers and philanthropy*. A small group of researchers funded by two business people were able to promote a significant research project that in 2013 was listed by *Time Magazine* as one of the 25 top inventions of the year. It was the only Australian invention listed. In some cases innovative approaches can only be funded by such partnerships because the national research funding schemes strongly favour ‘safe’ research.  *Research and Non-Governmental Organisations*: for fifteen years, Professor Mike Mahoney (University of Newcastle) has conducted field research projects in conservation biology in association with a large NGO (Earthwatch Institute). Earthwatch is a strong promoter of citizen science, and it operates on the basis that citizens are keen to understand, be involved and committed to the natural environment. Over 200 Australian senior students and 300 adults have participated in field trips of seven and fourteen days that Prof Mahoney has conducted, and the project that he runs is one of only twelve offered in Australia. Financial support has come from private trusts and by volunteers paying to be involved. The Australian government could contribute to these win–win partnerships by allowing the costs of field trips borne by volunteer citizens to be tax deductible (the US government does this for bona fide research). | |
| 1. **Enable encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage** | |
| * + - * 1. Education, including more positive media, valuing and supporting individual and community involvement in heritage appreciation and conservation.         2. Case studies of community groups making a difference – consider the example of the Hunter Wetland Centre as an exemplar of what can be achieved by community organisations, and the challenges they face in staying afloat. Community organisation case studies help others to plan by providing inspiration and models to emulate.         3. New social media are very successful in facilitating many human activities but they do not seem to have been successfully used in natural heritage. There are many examples of effective and clever web sites, but not so many video clips. | |
| **Other comments** | |
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