



## TEMPLATE FOR INPUT INTO THE AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY

### Overview

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

### Contact Details

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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?

1. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the direction and content of an Australian Heritage Strategy.
2. The Australian government must play a continuing and active role in relation to World Heritage and National Heritage places. This requires leadership roles in at least:
  - policy, planning and regulation in national and international contexts
  - ensuring effective governance systems are established for each listed place
  - ensuring establishment and effective implementation of national coordination of heritage management systems
  - identifying, listing and promoting heritage places as well as 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, and
  - supporting World and National heritage place management through provision of adequate funding.



3. The Wet Tropics Management Authority (the Authority) notes that 'improved support for Australia's iconic World Heritage sites' is listed as a commitment and proposed action under the *National Leadership* theme. The Authority supports this commitment and requests additional proposed actions in relation to this theme to include:
  - a commitment to financially support all 19 Australian World Heritage properties. In particular, the Strategy should provide a clear commitment for ongoing funding programs and actions that are directed at compliance with the World Heritage Convention obligations
  - that 'place specific' management plans to be prepared for each property based on a consistent framework. This would include statement and details about the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), which should be clearly defined and central elements within the protection and management plan for the property.
4. 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 *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is vital and generally effective and should be supported by an appropriate complementary framework of state and local laws.
5. While retaining the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) as a key framework, proactive regional solutions administered through State law or planning systems might provide for effective, regionally administered protection, greater certainty for developers and in turn, greater support for the positive values of heritage places.
6. The Authority asserts that there is a strong argument for establishing and supporting strong, place-based systems of governance for World and National heritage 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 (<http://aciucn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/ACIUCN%20World%20Heritage%20Book.pdf>).
7. Governance systems also need to ensure that there is executive delivery capacity commensurate with the scale and complexity of the place. 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.
8. The Authority believes that Australian World Heritage policy coordination has declined in recent years, and that the Australian government should take a more prominent role in World Heritage management and oversight. Despite the recent World Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement (2009) between the Australian government and states and territories, recent years have seen the abolition of relevant policy bodies, including property-specific Ministerial Councils and the Environment Protection and Heritage Council, as well as a significant decline in support for the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC).
9. Regardless of the decline in support from the Australian government for the AWHAC, the Authority is an active participant and remains committed to this committee, which was established to facilitate communication and collaboration with the Commonwealth and among World Heritage properties.



Neither the AWHAC nor the Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network (AWHIN) are mentioned in the Strategy. The Authority recommends that the Strategy is an opportunity to 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 serves a useful purpose in information sharing and collaboration between World Heritage properties and the Commonwealth and should continue to be supported in some form at least which was established under the Australian World Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement (2009) to provide advice and support to Ministers with responsibility for World Heritage policy and properties.

10. The Authority believes that the overall content of the Strategy relating to Indigenous heritage could be strengthened considerably. The Strategy should commit to appropriate process for engagement and best practice consultation mechanisms and consent of Traditional Owners in the processes leading to listing on the National Heritage List and World Heritage List. Engagement needs to be established very early in the listing process, and is very important wherever landscapes are under consideration for listing, even if the principal rationale for listing relates to natural, rather than cultural (indigenous) values.
11. The Authority was delighted with the decision include the cultural (indigenous) heritage values of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area on the National Heritage List in 2012. National Heritage listing helped to overcome the concern Rainforest Aboriginal people felt when the Wet Tropics was listed as World Heritage for natural values only. This recent experience demonstrated 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. The Authority remains committed to working with Rainforest Aboriginal people to develop and implement management plans in accordance with the National Heritage management principles.

## 2. 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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?

12. The Authority supports the *Pursue innovative Partnerships* theme outlined in the Strategy. In relation to the commitment 'Innovative funding, resource sharing and creative partnerships', the Authority is interested in better capitalising on the World Heritage brand 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). World Heritage is globally significant, 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 (refer <http://whc.unesco.org/en/partners/>).
13. The Authority notes the Australian Government's proposed commitment 'one-stop shop streamlining',



which will rely on accreditation of State and Territory planning systems to manage environmental assessment and approval processes under the EPBC Act. In the event that delegation relating to World Heritage proceeds, 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.

14. The Authority notes the extent to which the Strategy depends on the Green Army initiative. The Authority believes the Green Army should complement existing (and longer-term three to five year) national heritage protection and environmental management programs such as Landcare, Working on Country and Caring for our Country. Particular care is needed to ensure that the program neither distorts established environmental labour markets nor diminishes voluntary community contributions to environmental programs.
15. The Authority 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. The Authority's experience is that research institutions are keen to align research effort to the needs of land managers. Establishment of a devolved grants program would create further stimulus and might be achieved on a cost-neutral basis by allocating a proportion of the National Environment Science Program to explicitly address Commonwealth research needs for national and World heritage.

### **3. 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?

16. Community and natural heritage are intertwined, and the heritage places most valued by communities contribute to sense of place, identity and provide tangible links to Australia's past and culture. World Heritage is of considerable interest to communities as well as local and international tourists and creates a major attraction for visitors to a place and its region. For example, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area produces \$452 of regional economic activity for every \$1 combined Commonwealth and State government investment, strengthening the case for ongoing substantial government investment.
17. With support from the Commonwealth, place managers should continue 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.
18. The Authority suggests that an additional commitment 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. Primary and secondary 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. Another innovative concept is that of a World Heritage Gateway Centre in north Queensland as a site which provides a nature based and educational visitor experience that celebrates World Heritage values and their significance within the broader context of Australia's World Heritage Areas.

19. 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.

#### **Other comments**

20. The Authority recognises the challenges of developing a unified Strategy, given the diversity of existing natural and cultural heritage legislation and policies. Australia has a four-tier system to identify and manage heritage places, and Authority considers that the roles and responsibilities of each jurisdiction, and how heritage places are identified and managed, could be more clearly depicted.