

# Protecting Australia's World Heritage Values

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I am honoured to be asked to deliver the Serventy Memorial Lecture because Vincent Serventy figured so largely in my earliest days in conservation. Back in 1967 after making the decision to form a Branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland in my home town of Maryborough, I received a phone call from State President, the poet Judith Wright asking if I could take Vincent on a trip I was making to Carnarvon Gorge National Park. Vincent was then the Editor of "Wildlife Australia".

It was only a small safari but it was the beginning of my life of appreciating the great natural wonders of Australia. That trip turned out to be my very first conservation safari and the first of hundreds of safaris I have led since.

Safaris have helped me see the wider environment from a more critical perspective. The Carnarvon Gorge trip with Vin started me evaluating all natural areas to set the priority which they respectively deserve as far as preservation for posterity.

It was this prioritising which led me to focus on the areas of greatest priority — the "Jewels in the Crown" of the natural environment — actual and potential World Heritage areas.

I was fortunate to have mentors such as Vincent Serventy and Judith Wright. It is small wonder that I was inspired to push harder than I otherwise may have. It was the beginning of a wonderfully rich lifetime conservation adventure which I have never regretted. This is despite some unwelcome repercussions. The richness of my good experiences has far more than offset the bad.

I should preface my lecture by pointing out that the observations I have made and the opinions I express are mine only. They have no official status and are not endorsed by any government agency. They have been drawn over a period of more than 30 years active involvement on the voluntary conservation movement. Over the last 17 years I have led almost 200 safaris. They have included all Australian World Heritage sites except the sub-Antarctic Islands.

My observations have also been shaped by my very heavy involvement over 20 years to have Fraser Island inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1992 and by visiting a number of overseas World Heritage sites specifically to see how they are managed.

The idea of creating an international movement for protecting heritage emerged after World War 2. It was based on the concept that there should be a list which incorporates and recognizes all of the Great Wonders of the World and that they are preserved for future generations and don't end up like so many of the great Grecian wonders of the past like the Acropolis and the Colossus of Rhodes etc.

The idea was that the World Heritage List would replace the list of seven great wonders of the world of ancient times which included also included the Colosseum and the Pyramids. However it also needed to recognize places not then known in Europe such as Machhu Pinchu and Ankor in South America and Asia. It also needed to include many great cultural monuments such as some of the grandiose cathedrals which have been built in the last two thousand years since the great Greek and the Roman periods. More importantly it was resolved that the list should include the Great Natural Wonders of the world as well as the cultural sites.

The event that aroused particular international concern was the decision to build the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, which would have flooded the valley containing the Abu Simbel temples. The idea of combining conservation of cultural sites with those of nature originated with the White House

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Conference in Washington, D.C., in 1965. Thus in 1972 the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was developed. This merged two separate movements: the first focusing on the preservation of cultural sites, and the other dealing with the conservation of nature.

Only an organization, which was part of the United Nations, had the resources to bring all of this together. In this case the vehicle is UNESCO. But even UNESCO has limited resources expertise. UNESCO enlisted the aid of two specialist consultant groups. ICOSMOS (The International Council on Monuments and Sites) provides specialist advice on the merits and conservation of the cultural side of the convention. On the natural side the specialist adviser is the IUCN now known as the World Conservation Union which is based in Switzerland.

The McMahon Government was in power when the World Heritage Convention was negotiated in 1972. McMahon immediately appointed Peter Howson as the first Commonwealth Environment Minister.

Australia became one of the first State Parties to ratify the convention under the Whitlam Government on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1974. Although the convention did not become operative until it had over 75 signatories ratify it Australia's act of ratification gave the Commonwealth Government for the first time the constitutional powers to act directly and in its own right on environmental matters. Through exercising its "Treaty Powers" under the constitution the Commonwealth gained powers to regulate on environmental matters was to increase tensions with some state governments — Western Australia and Queensland in particular. I will deal with them in more detail later.

Australia's primary interest in the World Heritage Convention was in the "Natural" side and we had in the Great Barrier Reef one of the most obvious sites for inclusion on the natural List. However, the natural side of the global list has been much more difficult to deal with from UNESCO's viewpoint. Moreover the number of potential natural sites is finite. Globally the natural environment shrinking rapidly and being modified by human activity. However future cultural sites such as the Sydney Opera House (which is destined to be nominated soon along with Sydney Harbour and its environs) continue to be created.

All World Heritage sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria. Some sites such as the Grand Canyon ("the world's greatest ditch"), Mount Everest ("the world's highest mountain") the Great Barrier Reef ("the world's greatest coral reef system") and Serengeti National Park ("the world's greatest assembly of mammals") suggested themselves. However, compared with the huge number of the great cultural monuments where Aztec, Inca, Buddhist, Islamic and Christian icons abounded.

Despite efforts to achieve a more even balance the two, the number of cultural sites on the World Heritage List outnumbers the number of natural sites by about four to one. Currently there are 812 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and they occur in 137 countries. 628 of these are cultural, 24 mixed properties and only 160 are listed for their natural values.

In Australia there are 16 World Heritage sites in all: 11 natural sites

- Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (Riversleigh/ Naracoorte) (1994)
- Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves (Australia) (CERRA) (1986)
- Fraser Island (1992)
- Great Barrier Reef (1981)
- Greater Blue Mountains Area (2000)
- Heard and McDonald Islands (1997)
- Lord Howe Island Group (1982)
- Macquarie Island (1997)
- Purnululu National Park (2003)
- Shark Bay, Western Australia (1991)
- Wet Tropics of Queensland (1988)

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There are four mixed (natural and cultural) sites:

- Kakadu National Park (1981)
- Tasmanian Wilderness (1982)
- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park (1987)
- Willandra Lakes Region (1981)

So far there is just one cultural site —

- Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens in Melbourne (2004)

There are ten criteria and to determine whether a sites measures up for the World Heritage Listing. To be listed a site has to measure up to the strict specifications to just one. However many sites are judged to meet two or more criteria. There are six (6) criteria determining whether a cultural site can be listed and there are just four (4) which strictly enforced. The others are fairly subjective but I thought that I would focus for this purpose of this lecture solely on the Natural components of the World Heritage.

The four criteria which determine whether a site meets the natural criteria are briefly summarized as (a) exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance, (b) outstanding examples of geomorphologic work, (c) biodiversity and (d) containing rare or threatened species.

The current wording of the Operational Guidelines for the natural criteria is much more exact:

- \*to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance; (aesthetics)*
- \*to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features; (geomorphology)*
- \*to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals; (biodiversity)*
- \*to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation. (threatened species/ecosystems)*

Although the four natural criteria have been refined by subsequent meetings of the World Heritage Committee which has met annually since 1978 when the Convention became operative they essentially define the same criteria which any site has to measure up against. Because Australia was the first signatory Australia was an original member of the World Heritage Committee and has played a prominent role ever since although the numbers of party states which have ratified the convention had grown to 180 States as of 31 March 2005.

**Great Barrier Reef:** When the World Heritage Committee met in 1978 to consider the very first sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage List, Australia did not put forward any nominations. The reason was that the then Premier of Queensland, Joh Bjelke Petersen, was intransigently opposed to surrendering any of his perceived "State's rights" to the Commonwealth Government. Joh had fanatically supported to oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef where he had oil search prospect rights. He saw allowing the Great Barrier Reef to be nominated as ceding some of his powers and "state's rights" to the national government.

However Malcolm Fraser was equally determined that Australia should not become the laughing stock of the world by not nominating its most obvious contender for World Heritage first. He issued Joh with an ultimatum that the Great Barrier Reef would be nominated with or without his acceptance. In a peace offering gave Queensland the right to nominate a person to the three-person Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Queensland nominated its most senior state public

servant, Coordinator General, Sid Schubert, whereas the other two members of the authority had environmental backgrounds. Thus when the World Heritage Committee met in Sydney in 1981 Australia was able to proceed to nominate its first three sites and have them accepted.

The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area covers a vast area. It is the largest World Heritage site. It includes more than 1500 coral reefs including all of its islands. In one stroke a whole suburb of Townsville, Magnetic Island as well as all of the resorts from Lady Elliot Island in the south to Lizard Island had all been included.

The World Heritage area though includes more than just the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which covers 99.3% of the World Heritage site. A large proportion of the management problems originate in the 0.7% which are not in the Marine Park particularly the islands. A major threat to the reef's integrity also comes from runoff from the mainland flowing out to sea.

It is ironic that we now have a Federal Government which is currently reviewing the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park legislation seemingly because some extreme conservatives think that GBRMPA is providing too much protection for the Reef and this has prompted a backlash.

In 1981 Australia also nominated two other sites: Kakadu, and Willandra Lakes.

**Willandra Lakes:** Right from the start voluntary conservationists were enthusiastic about the potential for the World Heritage Convention providing greater environmental protection within Australia.

In 1974 the Australian Conservation Foundation began defining an Australian indicative World Heritage List and identified the Great Barrier Reef as our top contender. By the end of 1976 the list had expanded to 15 potential natural World Heritage sites. In 1977, before the convention had become operational, I undertook a world tour which was to study the voluntary conservation movement as well as doing some informal lobbying for the sites on the ACF's indicative list.

It was therefore surprising when we discovered that Willandra Lakes, which the ACF hadn't even considered, had been included on the list.

While some sites such as the Blue Mountains and Willandra Lakes have made ACF's 1976 "Wish-list", four outstanding sites still remain to be included. These are Cape York Peninsula, the Channel Country and Lake Eyre, the Kimberley region particularly the Prince Regent River and the National Parks of the South West.

The ACF knew of the archaeological significance of the Willandra Lakes site but just hadn't considered its natural values to meet World Heritage criteria. This semi arid area between Broken Hill and Mildura has many outstanding values. The inscribed 250,000 ha Willandra Lakes site contains a system of Pleistocene lakes, formed over the last two million years. Most are fringed on the eastern shore by a dune or lunette formed by the prevailing winds. Luckily one of the great Australian movers and shakers in the scientific community, Prof John Mulvaney, had a great grasp on the World Heritage Convention and great influence on the Australian position seized the opportunity of making Willandra Lakes one of our first nominations. Mulvaney also recognized the natural as well as the cultural significance of this site and so it is listed for both its cultural and natural values.

There were a tragic mistake was made in the process of listing the Willandra Lakes. Only a small part of the site was within the Mungo National Park. The bulk of the area was in several grazing leases. None of the more than a dozen private landholders were consulted about the nomination before it was listed. Landholders learnt only from the media that their land had been given World Heritage status. They were subsequently given incorrect advice afterwards that their grazing leases would be acquired by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. Unfortunately the Parks Service was unaware for many years that this unauthorized promise had been made. For almost two decades these graziers waited in frustration for negotiations. During this hiatus period

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the graziers were prevented from carrying out their land management because of the presumption of resumption. The relevant government agency (the NPWS) was not even aware of the problem.

This misunderstanding has caused in many incorrect myths about World Heritage in rural Australia resulting in some hostility to nominations. This resulted in fierce opposition to nominating the Lake Eyre Basin. It helped Joh Bjelke-Petersen justify his opposition to the nomination of just “*one more inch of Queensland*”. In 1996 the matter was belatedly resolved but the bad taste had already made an impact in rural Australia through galah gossip.

I need to explain that although the Commonwealth Government have the exclusive power to nominate World Heritage sites and don't require State endorsement, the reality is that they usually seek state support and are reluctant to proceed without it. There often has to be some heavy cajoling. Eventually they got it for the Great Barrier Reef. However, there have been major political battles over Stage 3 of Kakadu, the Wet Tropics and the extension of the Tasmanian Wilderness site when the States and the Northern Territory opposed the listing.

**Kakadu:** Initially there was no opposition to the nomination of Kakadu National Park from the Northern Territory government for World Heritage mainly because (a) the Ranger Environmental Inquiry of 1975-76 had recommended it amongst other things, and (b) the Commonwealth had control of Kakadu and it was not under the jurisdiction of the Northern Territory government. However that was only Stage 1.

By the time that Stage III was due to be added to this huge World Heritage site to bring it up to almost 20,000 square kilometres the then Northern Territory (LCP) Government and a lot of conservative forces were actively lobbying against World Heritage listing. Gareth Evans claimed that Stage III was “*clapped out buffalo country*” not warranting listing. In truth most the Northern Territory opposition wasn't based the validity of the World Heritage values, but on trying to reduce the Commonwealth Government's powers in what they wanted to be Northern Territory sovereignty. They also wanted to see uranium and gold mining within the World Heritage area. The Northern Territory Government even sent people to the meeting of the World Heritage Committee to lobby against its listing. Despite that Kakadu was listed.

Kakadu is inscribed for each of the four natural criteria as well as one cultural criteria as well. Few World Heritage sites in the world meet more than World Heritage criteria. Kakadu meets five.

It is an irony that after having had to resist this lobbying by the Northern Territory Government to get the last stages of Kakadu on to the World Heritage list, the Commonwealth Government subsequently spent a lot of effort to avoid having Kakadu placed on the “World Heritage in Danger List” due to the activities of uranium miners working in inholdings within Stage I of the Kakadu National Park. Although Kakadu escaped this unwanted listing, the Australian Government could not escape the embarrassment of being called to account for its management of this site which is entirely under their direct jurisdiction.

In the next round of World Heritage nominations in 1982 Australia added two more sites — South West Tasmania and Lord Howe Island

**South West Tasmania:** During the 1970s Tasmania went been through a very traumatic and defining environmental battle over the future of the original Lake Pedder. This had unnecessarily drowned to enlarge a hydro scheme. That action has polarized Tasmanian politics ever since and resulted in the establishment of The Wilderness Society (TWS), which was originally the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, and the United Tasmanian Group (UTG) political party the forerunner of The Greens. For a while after the Pedder decision there was a more reasoned state

government in Tasmania under the Premiership of Doug Lowe who agreed to allow the World Heritage nomination of South West Tasmania.

It was a decision which subsequent Tasmanian state governments have smarted over since because almost immediately after it was nominated the Hydro Electric Commission (HEC) decided to push ahead with the damming of the Gordon River below the Franklin River which would have flooded the Franklin River.

That resulted in bitter battle which ended in the High Court handing down a decision in the now famous 1984 "Dams Case" which endorsed the Commonwealth position. It reinforced and entrenched the opposition to World Heritage within some of the states including Western Australia.

However the incredibly powerful hydro-electricity in Tasmania was not the only threat to that magnificent island's World Heritage values. An even more entrenched power group is progressively and systematically transforming that beautiful island's natural forest into plantation which has opposed and still vigourously opposes expansion of the 1982 World Heritage area. I will deal with the Stage II nomination further on.

**Lord Howe Island:** Lord Howe Island is one of the few Australian World Heritage sites which has not been subject to any political feuding between the State and Commonwealth Governments. It is a beautiful and uncontentious areas being a Jewel of the Pacific. It is seen though by only about 13,000 visitors each year. The New South Wales government is enthusiastic about including its territory on the World Heritage List probably because it is less paranoid about the additional powers it may imply to the Commonwealth. In fact they have deliberately acted to allow the Commonwealth the right to veto some state actions within World Heritage areas such as the rainforests.

**CERRA:** It is unfortunate that there isn't yet a catchy name to encapsulate the title, "Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia" other than its acronym.

In the late 1970s early 1980s there was a tremendous furore within New South Wales over logging of the rainforests. Eventually after a courageous political decision the Wran Government converted many rainforest areas from State Forests to National Parks to protect the bulk of the New South Wales rainforests from logging. The Opposition countered by saying that if it was elected it would reverse that decision when it came to power. Wran immediately sought to nominate the sites for World Heritage listing so that no future state government could unilaterally allow logging to resume without the endorsement of the Commonwealth Government. This added an extra layer of protection to the rainforest reserves which had been decided should never be logged again.

Adding another layer of protection has always been one of the reasons for the voluntary conservation movement supporting and so strongly advocating World Heritage listing for any areas which meet the criteria. It was good to see that enlightened state governments saw the value as well.

Not all of the rainforest areas which met the World Heritage are in New South Wales. Some of the areas best representing the values were in Queensland. Therefore New South Wales proceeded to include Queensland National Parks, especially Lamington, as part of their nomination. Unfortunately the Commonwealth decided that no state could nominate areas within other states and so because of Queensland's then implacable opposition the New South Wales reserves went ahead alone without Queensland. Only the New South Wales reserves were inscribed in 1986.

It was not until the election of the Goss Government in 1989 that Queensland agreed to allow their rainforest reserves to be added to CERRA in 1993.

However, even then opposition to World Heritage in some regions, particularly around Kingaroy, (home of the late Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen) has meant that probably the most significant of all

the reserves, the Bunya Mountains National Park, which contains the greatest remnant of the auracarian forests which once sprawled over the continent remain outside World Heritage listing. The World Heritage Committee has pointed out how anomalous this. However since World Heritage listing essentially requires community support to be functional the Bunyas will have to wait until the South Burnett community's views mellow.

**Victoria and South Australia:** While Queensland and Western Australia were reluctant, two states, Victoria and South Australia, were enthusiastic to have sites within their states inscribed on the World Heritage natural List. They craved to have the recognition which World Heritage brings to sites. Both Governments have commissioned studies to evaluate potential sites. In the case of South Australia it sought to nominate the Nullabor Plains but it never made it. It has been suggested that this nomination didn't eventuate because Western Australia refused to cooperate. It was to be a cross border nomination with some of the most important parts in Western Australia. By a curious irony the South Australian Government's desire to nominate the Channel Country and the Lake Eyre basin suffered a similar fate with Queensland (which has most of the Channel Country) thwarting this nomination.

**Australian Fossil sites:** Following the replacement of the Bjelke-Petersen regime in Queensland it became possible to nominate the Riversleigh Fossil site in northwest Queensland. However the Commonwealth Government thought that it should be combined with the Naracoorte Caves into a single nomination — the Australian Fossil Sites. South Australia was so enthusiastic about having a site included for its cave values they set about completely transforming the Naracoorte site from a pine plantation to a natural bush site. Although the landscape was not one of the values for which the Naracoorte Caves were inscribed, the transformation in just a few years has been incredible. The Visitor Centre is one of the most impressive interpretations of any World Heritage site although the Naracoorte site covers such a small area. It is testimony to the enthusiasm for World Heritage.

**MAB Sites and Victoria:** Victoria has three sites listed as International Biosphere Reserves, which comes under the convention for the Man and the Biosphere, which, like the World Heritage Convention, is also administered by UNESCO. True to its ideology the Bjelke-Petersen Government refused to allow any part of Queensland to be nominated as a Biosphere Reserve although oddly enough, two other states which were resistant to World Heritage listing, Tasmania and Western Australia accepted the nomination of some sites as Biosphere Reserves. However none of the Victorian Biosphere Reserves have been accepted for World Heritage nomination.

Although both falling within the aegis of UNESCO, the criteria for Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage sites are quite different and despite its enthusiasm Victoria has yet to have a natural site added to the list. So far few Biosphere Reserves also have World Heritage status. One outstanding exception is the Great Smokies National Park, America's most visited National Park, where its status as a Biosphere Reserve is promoted much more than its World Heritage status. Australia has one site, Uluru Kata-Tjuta which enjoys both statuses. I mention this because there is clearly a strong case for Western Australia's Fitzgerald River National Park to join an elite club having both listings.

The ACF is satisfied that either the Australian Alps and/or the biodiversity of the eucalypts in Gippsland could qualify for listing under natural criteria. The proposal for a "Sea to Snow" (forest and Alps) proposal has been endorsed by the World Heritage Expert Panel, the Victorian Government has not been able to get the Commonwealth Government to proceed with it.

**Royal Exhibition Building:** Seemingly, as some sort of consolation for missing out so far on a natural Listing, Victoria has been given the honour of having Australia's first cultural site placed on

the World Heritage list. Inscribed in 2004 the World Heritage values are stated as, *“The Royal Exhibition Building and the surrounding Carlton Gardens, as the main extant survivors of a Palace of Industry ... together reflect the global influence of the international exhibition movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries”*

**Shark Bay:** The IUCN, wanted to hold their 1991 triennial General Assemblies in the southern hemisphere and Australia was invited to host it. The Western Australia was eager for it to be held in Perth since it attracted thousands of delegates from almost every country on Earth. The Australian Government made it conditional that Perth could host the event but the Western Australia Government would need to show some support for World Heritage by agreeing to let Shark Bay be nominated for World Heritage Listing. It was a bitter pill for the state government here to swallow because it had been almost as ideologically opposed to World Heritage as the Queensland Government. However that is how the first Western Australia site came to be listed. It is interesting to observe though, that since the benefits of Shark Bay experienced after its listing, Western Australia opposition to World Heritage has rapidly mellowed.

**Punululu:** With the experience of Shark Bay the Western Australia Government began to appreciate that World Heritage was not such an onerous obligation and in fact brought many benefits. Thus as its resistance wore down it finally agreed to the nomination of Punululu. This was a minimalist approach to the incredible array of World Heritage values throughout the Kimberley. I would argue that when applying World Heritage criteria to the Kimberley Coast especially the Buccaneer Archipelago and the Princess Regent River, the Mitchell Plateau and the Kimberley Devonian Reef, they have probably stronger claims for World Heritage than Purnululu. Purnululu was eventually inscribed in 2003. It may be more than a decade before other even more deserving parts of the Kimberley are listed.

Over the past decade there has been a significant mood swing in Western Australia towards World Heritage and the Gallop Government is now proceeding with a nomination of Ningaloo Reef and the Cape Range National Park which should be accepted next year.

**Sub Antarctic Islands:** There are other Australian World Heritage sites, which I won't deal with in detail. Macquarie Island and the Heard and MacDonald Islands represent two sub-Antarctic World Heritage sites inscribed in 1997. They were very uncontentious but the difficulty of access mean that relatively few people have first hand experience of them (and very few want to experience the rough sea voyages to get there). There was some contention over Macquarie Island both because New Zealand wanted it combined with their Sub-Antarctic islands nomination and also because initially it was to be listed only for its geological significance ignoring the habitat values for the vast populations of seals and penguins. In the end it was listed for both its geological values and its aesthetics.

**Uluru:** The inscription of Uluru - Kata Tjuta in 1987 as both a cultural and a natural site was also uncontentious as the adversarial standoff between the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments hadn't yet developed and in any event the traditional owners insisted that the National Park should be managed by the Commonwealth Government which wasn't seen as racist or hostile to them. Thus the Northern Territory government had no say in the matter. It is truly a wonderful site and attracts more than 350,000 visitors annually.

All of that is a preface to the three more contentious Australian sites to be listed.

**The Tasmanian World Heritage Extension:** The very first time that the Commonwealth used the powers that it had acquired under the World Heritage Convention to over-ride the State Government's decision was when the Hawke Government was elected in 1983 with a promise to stop the drowning of the Franklin River for a hydro electric scheme. That intensified opposition by many states to World Heritage listing. However, the battles for the better protection of Tasmania which has one of the world's greatest temperate wilderness areas didn't cease after the High Court endorsed the Hawke Government's actions on the Franklin.

The original World Heritage nomination for the South West omitted many areas which were equally as worthy of Listing as the original site. These were being threatened by logging and other operations. In a bid to stop this intrusion into more of Tasmania's wonderful forests (which contain the world's tallest flowering plants (*Eucalyptus regnans*) conservationists appealed for Commonwealth intervention over an intransigent pro-logging state government.

The Commonwealth commissioned another inquiry (Helsham Inquiry) to determine what additional areas if any should be added to the World Heritage estate in Tasmania. The inquiry was inconclusive but the Commonwealth Government adopted the minority report which recommended that extensive new areas containing some of the island's best tall forests be added to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area despite the opposition of the Tasmanian Government.

The 1989 renomination almost doubled the size of the World Heritage area. However the Commonwealth Government provided a generous financial package to gain better cooperation from Tasmanian Government to manage the enlarged World Heritage area. Thus the opposition of the Tasmanian Government to the World Heritage extension was muted.

The ACF is still urging a further 33% increase to the Tasmanian Wilderness to about 2 million hectares. That would include the Tarkine and other outstanding natural areas that have so far been left open for unwarranted exploitation. That would be Stage iii of the Tasmanian Wilderness.

**The Wet Tropics:** The Wet Tropics are located in Queensland along with four other World Heritage sites and like all of the others in that state it wasn't inscribed without an absolutely monumental political battle. Unlike the disputes between Canberra and Brisbane over the Great Barrier Reef, this one was headline news for years.

It began in earnest with the attempts by Queensland conservationists to stop the road through the Daintree and to stop logging of the precious rainforest. Every effort was resisted by Bjelke-Petersen who was then reigning supreme in Queensland.

The Commonwealth tried many ploys to resolve the issue with the agreement of the Queensland Government. In 1983 convened a conference on the future of Australian rainforest held in Cairns in an attempt to get a more rational approach particularly from Queensland and Tasmania where most of the rainforest disputes were occurring (although there were still some substantial confrontations in Victoria).

One of the outcomes of the Cairns Conference was the establishment of a National Rainforest Working Group to which I was appointed. We met several times over the next few years and while one tangible outcome was the Rainforest Conservation Strategy which focussed on increasing public awareness of the value of rainforests, it had a residual value in identifying the unquestionable values of the Wet Tropics which merited their inclusion on the World Heritage list as an even greater priority than the CERRA rainforests which were already listed. The ever-paranoid Queensland National Party Government saw this as a threat the very destructive logging industry that they supported without any reservations and firmly resisted.

All of these appeals to Queensland failed. Unfortunately the World Heritage nomination had to wait until Barry Cohen was replaced by Graham Richardson at Federal Environment Minister. It required a head kicker like "Richo" to confront the opposition to the intransigent Bjelke-Petersen

Government and that was only because Richo saw that protecting the environment could win votes for the ALP.

The Wet Tropics rainforests are the world's oldest rainforests and contain most of the world's oldest known flowering plants as well as other outstanding values, that they fully deserved to be listed. The arguments for protecting them were so compelling that even the most eminent biologists in the world were agreed. Finally the then Commonwealth Environment Minister Graham Richardson decided to over-ride the Queensland opposition and to proceed to nominate them. This didn't stop the Queensland Government sending a contingent to Brazil where the World Heritage Committee met to consider the matter to lobby most vigorously and vociferously against its Listing. Finally not only did good sense prevail but the Commonwealth proscribed any further logging and clearing in this very special area.

The idea of lobbying the World Heritage Committee to stop the Commonwealth from nominating areas which Australian states didn't agree with appealed to the Northern Territory Government who followed this precedent to try to prevent Stage III of Kakadu being inscribed because it effectively ruled out forever the prospect of a large mine at Coronation Hill. It was another example of States preferring exploitation to protection of heritage values.

Just as the Commonwealth Government had previously offered a financial peace-offering to the Tasmanian Government to buy some peace over World Heritage listing it tried to pacify the Queensland Government into cooperating in the better management of the Wet Tropics World Heritage site with financial inducements. They have only been partially successful in mollifying the ever-resistant Queensland Government.

**Blue Mountains:** I have failed so far to deal with the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage site. Following the discovery of the ancient Wollemi Pine there in recent years its claim for World Heritage recognition was significantly advanced. I was present at the World Heritage Committee meeting in Cairns in 2000 when this was inscribed. It was far from a "lay down mizere". It is a wonderful area but not all of the values, particularly the cultural values, have yet been recognized. It appears that there is some jealousy that Australia may be claiming too much World Heritage compared with other nations and so its Australian claims are subject to intense scrutiny.

## Fraser Island

I can now explain more clearly why the inscription of Fraser Island on the World Heritage List was such an ordeal and the many obstacles that had to be overcome not the least being the intransigent opposition of the Bjelke-Petersen government for almost 20 years.

It all began in 1971 when sandmining companies that already had some mining leases on Fraser Island sought to acquire new areas. This was too much for the conservation movement which had not been organized when the original leases had been granted. I was then the Honorary Secretary of the Maryborough Branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ) and I immediately began to organize opposition. We decided this should be through a separate organization. Thus the Fraser Island Defenders Organization was born. It was soon widely known by its acronym FIDO, the "watchdog of Fraser Island".

The Queensland Government though was tough in its support for sandmining. It even stage-managed the Mining Warden's hearings and other inquiries to end up with some validation for its stance. Later Sir Joh said publicly when the Fitzgerald Inquiry was let loose in Queensland that the government should never hold any inquiry unless it knew what the outcome would be first.

So by the end of 1971 the stage looked set for the death knell to Fraser Island's natural integrity. A year later though the election of the Whitlam Government meant that there was a more interventionist Federal Government prepared to use the Commonwealth's constitutional powers to

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override the States where it was deemed to be in the public interest. The export of mineral sands from Fraser Island was deemed to be one such issue.

There was some vacillation from Labor policy on the part of Whitlam and Rex Connor which almost surrendered Fraser Island. However Whitlam accepted his error and in 1975 established the Fraser Island Environmental Inquiry. When it reported on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1976 it resulted in both the cessation of all sandmining on Fraser Island and Fraser Island being the very first item listed on the Register of the National Estate. In fact I was in Parliament House, Canberra, when the then Federal Environment Minister, Kevin Newman, said that Fraser Island would be nominated for World Heritage listing as soon as the convention became operative.

Despite that promise the campaign to achieve that outcome was the most difficult in FIDO's long history. The main obstacle was how to deal with the entrenched timber industry which had established a grip on Fraser Island as early as 1863. The Commonwealth could stop sandmining because it could stop issuing export licences. All of Fraser Island's timber was consumed on the domestic market and the Bjelke-Petersen Government was determined that it should continue even though the State was losing money to keep it going. There was an issue of political face. Joh had got egg on his face over the stopping of sandmining on Fraser Island and he wasn't going to make any concessions by seeing logging on Fraser Island stopped which was one of the inevitabilities. Joh had also lost face on other environmental issues in Queensland including Cooloola, the Great Barrier Reef, and the Wet Tropics. He was definitely in no mood to compromise despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of Queenslanders wanted Fraser Island protected from logging.

The Commonwealth was intimidated and didn't want another confrontation with the aging hillbilly dictator and were prepared to wait rather than push the issue. It was only after the Bjelke-Petersen government was voted out of office in 1989 and the new Goss Government had initiated yet another inquiry headed by the incorruptible Tony Fitzgerald that a Queensland Government finally agreed to nominate the whole of the Great Sandy Region including the marine areas and Fraser Island for World Heritage. The Commonwealth was happy to proceed.

Unfortunately the nomination was very poorly evaluated which led to Cooloola and the surrounding marine areas of Hervey Bay being omitted for the area. (Cooloola is a sister sandmass to Fraser Island on the opposite side of Great Sandy Strait stretching down to the Noosa River). Only Fraser Island was finally inscribed in November 1992, almost 22 years after FIDO was formed and then inscribed only for two of the World Heritage values.

Since then the most expert scientists in Queensland have met and scrutinized the values of both Fraser Island and Cooloola and are agreed that both areas equally deserving of World Heritage listing and have thoroughly detailed the full set of values. The Commonwealth has now agreed to the renomination of both areas but this may still be a year or two off. Anyone who thinks that the listing of any World Heritage site is an easy or speedy process is unaware of the many hurdles that have to be overcome.

Since its World Heritage listing there has been a continual battle to ensure that Fraser Island's values are not compromised. World Heritage status is not a guarantee that the site will be properly managed. World Heritage management is entrusted to bureaucrats who for the most part place their careers first and taking the line of least resistance (LOLR) to make their lives easier second, with the protection of the public interest and the environmental values being of lesser consideration. Currently there is no person with in a senior management position making decisions on Fraser Island who has been in their position for more than five years. Few of more than 40 National Park Rangers serving on the island have more than five years experience with the island. As a result there are many ill-advised decisions being made on a daily basis which threaten the natural integrity of the island. These include the management of the fire regime, the approach to dealing with weeds and other introduced pests and how the patterns of recreation are managed. Because the best decisions which have to be made are difficult they are stalled and shelved and placed in the "too hard" basket.

**Watchdog roles:** I don't want to dwell on the many difficult issues of management which confront Fraser Island. Similar problems exist in many National Parks. It is just that Fraser Island's sand is more unnatural erosion prone than most other Australian environments. Also most Australian National Parks don't attract almost 400,000 visitors annually. Because Fraser Island contributes more than a quarter of a billion dollars annually to the Queensland economy the wider community is now addicted to expecting this cash cow to continue to generate this wealth even if it is being achieved unsustainably. .

Only a few Australian National Parks have World Heritage status. What I do want to concentrate on is how vitally important it is to have a watchdog organization to ensure that the areas which are supposed to have protected status receive the best management. FIDO is fortunate that its name implies that it is a watchdog organization. There are many examples of great Australian national parks which are allowed to become needlessly degraded simply because there was no public involvement to ensure that the appointed managers placed the public interest as the benchmark of their obligations as managers. Those parks which have good watchdogs and where the Park's officers accept the role and support of community based organizations are in far better shape than those where an isolationist management style shuns any criticism of the bureaucracy and fails to properly consult before becoming locked into positions.

**Invoking proprietorial protection:** That brings me to an interesting phenomenon of developing community pride as a basis for the better management of our heritage whether it be our cultural heritage, our natural heritage or World Heritage. If the whole nation takes pride in the value of its national assets then there are millions of "watchdogs". It was just this community proprietorial response which made it unthinkable that oil-drilling would be allowed on the Great Barrier Reef .

I grew up in and lived most of my life the Queensland provincial city of Maryborough. This once prosperous river port city for decades escaped the development and re-development boom that has transformed most of the other Queensland regional centres. The result was that Maryborough was left with the best assemblage of vernacular architecture, particularly with its wonderful and unique old 'Queenslander' wooden houses. These are difficult and expensive to upkeep. Deteriorating wood and paint is expensive to replace and renew. Thus from the 1950s to the 1970s many were destroyed, replaced or modified. However in the mid 1980s the locals began to appreciate the heritage value of these unique buildings. Now these houses are being lovingly cared for and renovated in their original style. Far from being destroyed these are now protected and renovated to their original form with a passionate pride. All of this has been accomplished without any legal status being given to the houses. The National Trust hasn't listed them and they haven't had any other preservation orders placed on them. Maryborough demonstrates the major benefit of people having a greater appreciation of the unique heritage values.

One of the values of World Heritage is that it encourages the public at large to take greater pride in these unique assets. They become more proprietorial and more protective of them. Thus the greatest value of World Heritage status isn't the additional legal layer of protection added by the Commonwealth assuming some responsibilities but more particularly the layer of protection which comes through the public

## Western Australia's South West Botanical Province

This brings me to the World Heritage significance of Western Australia's South West.

The most glaring omission from Australia's formidable list of World Heritage sites is a comprehensive representation of the biodiversity of this outstanding region. The main reason seems to be that the outstanding biodiversity has been seriously underrated especially by Western Australians. The lack of wider public appreciation of the potential World Heritage values has resulted in a succession of Western Australian governments failing to give any priority to this region and pushing for its greater global recognition. When

The South West Botanical Province contains over 5700 species. Of these, more than 4500 are endemic (79.2%). (Figures taken from 'The Western Australian Flora: A Descriptive Catalogue', Paczkowska and Chapman, 2000). This is more species than contained in Australia's Wet Tropics rainforests (somewhere between 4000 and 5000). The South West also has a much higher percentage of endemics. While some of this is in the tall karri-jarrah forests (which the Gallop Government is already committed to nominating for World Heritage) a much greater array of species is found the heathlands particularly in National Parks like Fitzgerald River, Stirling Ranges and Mt Leseur.

The South West Region is one of the hottest spots on the globe for biodiversity yet it has been ignored by the international community, by Australians as a whole, and even by normally parochial Western Australians who seem to have taken the outstanding values of the region for granted. Doubtless as more Western Australians discover just how special the biodiversity of the South West is, they will regard it with new affection and afford it even greater protection.

I believe that the World Heritage nomination should include all (or most) of the Class A Nature Reserves and the National Parks from Kalbarri to Esperance in a serial World Heritage nomination. While World Heritage Listing would not add much to the legal protection of these sites, it would commit the Commonwealth Government to also guaranteeing that the integrity of these sites would be maintained. It would also ensure that the sites are significantly better presented and interpreted.

The greatest benefits of World Heritage nomination though, comes not from any additional legal protection but from the changed attitude of the public towards the site. Maryborough demonstrates the major benefit of people having a greater appreciation of the unique heritage values. Doubtless as more Western Australians discover just how special the biodiversity of the South West is, they will regard it with new affection and protection.

Providing World Heritage status will have beneficial spin-offs for naturalist clubs in Western Australia. It should also stimulate a more protective attitude towards these outstanding natural treasures. For example, it would encourage the public at large to avoid the unwanted intrusion of ferals and weeds which are the most sinister threat to maintaining the integrity of many reserves. There has already been a significant attitudinal change at Shark Bay where many of the values which were previously taken for granted by the locals and other Western Australians are now regarded with protective pride. This is worth far more than any legal protection.

There would also be a very significant economic benefit to the state from World Heritage Listing. We are continually assailed by claims of 'the best', 'the greatest' or 'the most wonderful', and it is increasingly difficult to identify the authentic from the second rate aspirants. A rigorous evaluation process using very strict criteria is used to assess possible World Heritage sites. World Heritage listing normally results in an increase in the number of visitors. Visitation to Fraser Island has been increasing at the rate of eight percent annually since it was listed in 1992. While this adds to the problems of management, it adds far more to the state and regional economies. The financial contribution of the Commonwealth helps but the fillip for the economy should more than compensate for the additional management costs provided that governments are prepared to invest in the better protection of the areas.

Regional centres should be major beneficiaries of the growth in tourism as more and more visitors from other parts of Australia and the world come to discover the biodiversity for themselves. This is because most of the areas for inclusion in any serial nomination are located in the regions.

While some people may have misgivings about impacts that could result from World Heritage Listing, I believe that the extra protection which comes about through the increased appreciation of the values and the economic benefits more than compensate. It also has to be accepted that through better management the impacts can be confined to the periphery of the areas near the car parks and paths. The vast bulk of the parks and reserves should never be affected by any increased visitation.

Another more significant benefit comes through being recognised as having iconic value. Thus the wildflowers and unique fauna of the South West would be featured in all sorts of promotion the way that Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef are included in a plethora of promotions.

It is in the interests of all Western Australians to ensure that the outstanding biodiversity of the South West does not remain underrated. It is something, which every Western Australian should take great pride in. However it won't happen unless Western Australian naturalist groups and other interested parties clearly identify the sites which should be nominated and establish the biodiversity credentials of this wonderful region which has excited me since I first encountered it.

It is in the best interests of all Western Australians to ensure that the biodiversity included in the World Heritage listings be representative of the whole of this remarkable and unique part of our continent: the South West Botanical Province.

**Future Australian nominations:** Australia has a wonderful array of World Heritage sites from the Sub-Antarctic to Torres Strait. However, there are other natural areas of Australia whose World Heritage values are still awaiting official recognition. These are:

- \* Cooloola and other parts of the Great Sandy Region
- \* parts of Cape York Peninsula
- \* Ningaloo and Cape Range
- \* the karri-jarrah forests,
- \* Sydney Harbour (including the Opera House)
- \* Australia's Convict heritage (cultural sites only - but including some parts of Fremantle, New South Wales, Tasmania and Norfolk Island)
- \* a transborder area embracing the Australian Alps and the south-eastern eucalypt forests of New South Wales and Gippsland

These are all in the process of being considered for nomination by the Federal and respective State Governments.

It is an interesting list but Western Australia's South West heathland National Parks and those very special parts of the Kimberley haven't even yet made the official "Wish List". Clearly they are the most overlooked Australian claimants for World Heritage status. This is so anomalous that I would urge each of you to as soon as possible grab the ear of any Parliamentarian (State or Federal) and urge them to support an inquiry to establish the World Heritage claims of the South West. I feel confident that it will be shown to compare more than favourably with South Africa's Cape Province and Amazonia.

World Heritage listing helps bring greater recognition and with that more proprietorial protection as well as economic benefits. Western Australia can't afford to neglect this issue any longer and when the nomination for the karri-jarrah forests go forward it should be as a part of a much larger nomination which embraces also the already protected heathlands between Shark Bay and Esperance.