

## What is World Heritage?

The World Heritage Convention was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1972. Its aim is to promote the protection of the Earth's irreplaceable natural and cultural heritage. Unlike the seven wonders of the ancient world, of which only one remains, it is envisaged that World Heritage properties will be conserved for all time for all people. In order to follow this policy, member countries undertake a commitment to engage in the 'appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage.'

### **The process of listing**

The World Heritage list, as of December 2000, comprises 690 sites in 122 countries. Each has been nominated by the national government of the member country and accepted by the World Heritage Committee. When nominations are received at the annual meeting of the World Heritage Bureau, rigorous assessment of the nominated property is conducted in collaboration with interna-

tional non-government organisations such as the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). Only sites deemed to be of outstanding universal value are accepted onto the World Heritage List.

### **Criteria for selection**

In order for a nominated site to be selected for World Heritage status, it must meet one or more specific criteria to ensure that the site is of outstanding value from either a cultural or natural point of view. There are six cultural and four natural criteria.

The natural criteria require that areas listed for World Heritage:

- i) be outstanding examples representing the major stages of the Earth's evolutionary history; or
- ii) be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing geological processes, biological evolution and man's interaction with his natural environment; or
- iii) contain superlative natural phenomena, formations or features; or

iv) contain the most important and significant natural habitats where threatened species of animals or plants of outstanding universal value still survive.

The cultural criteria require the nominated World Heritage property to:

- i) represent a unique artistic achievement, a masterpiece of the creative; or
- ii) have exerted great influence on developments in architecture, monumental arts or town planning and landscaping; or
- iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a civilisation which has disappeared; or
- iv) be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural ensemble which illustrates a significant change in history; or
- v) be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement which is representative of a culture and which has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change; or
- vi) be directly and tangibly associated with events or with ideas or beliefs of outstanding universal significance.

Of the 690 World Heritage properties on the World Heritage List, 529 are listed for their cultural heritage values and 138 are listed for their natural heritage values. Only 23 are listed for both natural and cultural heritage values.

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area satisfies all natural criteria and cultural criteria iii), v) and vi). Only one other World Heritage property — Mt Taishan in China — satisfies as many criteria for selection.

### **The World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983**

Listing of a site on the World Heritage List does not imply international administration or management of the site. The management of a World Heritage Site is the sole responsibility of the member nation. Australia is one of the few countries to have passed legislation — *The World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983* — that specifically gives some protection to the integrity of the natural or cultural features for which a World Heritage Site is listed. It was the application of this Act that led to cessation of work on the Gordon-below-Franklin hydro-electric power scheme. While the Act does not make any provision for the Commonwealth Government to assume responsibility for the management of a property, it does allow for Federal intervention in order

to prevent the damage or destruction of a World Heritage Property.

### **Australia's World Heritage areas**

Australia became the seventh country to ratify the convention, in 1974. As of December 2000, Australia has 14 properties listed on the World Heritage List, each representing a considerable diversity of features which ensure their place among those regions of the world which are of outstanding universal significance. The properties are (in order of listing):

- Great Barrier Reef
- Kakadu National Park
- Willandra Lakes Region of Western NSW
- Lord Howe Island Group
- Tasmanian Wilderness
- Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves
- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park
- Wet Tropics of Queensland
- Shark Bay, Western Australia
- Fraser Island
- Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (Riversleigh, Naracoorte)
- Heard and McDonald Islands
- Macquarie Island
- The Greater Blue Mountains Area

### **Benefits of World Heritage listing**

The inscription of a property on the World Heritage list gives the property an international recognition which

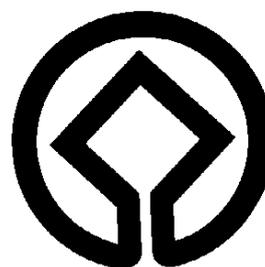
promotes local and national pride, and engenders feelings of national responsibility to protect the area. Listing also promotes opportunities for greatly increased tourist visitation and accompanying increases in employment and revenue generation. Local communities benefit from improvements in the planning and management of the property.

### **Further reading**

Smith, S. J. and Banks, M. R. (eds) (1993). *Tasmanian Wilderness-World Heritage Values*. Royal Society of Tasmania, Hobart 1-8.

Parks and Wildlife Service. (1991). *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area: Draft Resources and Issues*.

Department of the Environment, Sport and Territories. (1995). *Australia's World Heritage*. Department of the Environment, Sport and Territories.



*The UNESCO World Heritage emblem symbolizes the interdependence of cultural and natural properties — the central square is a form created by humans and the circle represents nature, the two being intimately linked. The emblem is round like the world, but at the same time is a symbol of protection.*