

# Foreword

## The Hon Tony Burke MP

Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities



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This year, 2012 marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, or the World Heritage Convention by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 1972. It is with great pride that I can say that Australia ratified the treaty in 1974 and was one of the first nations to enact legislation to carry out its responsibilities under the *Convention*.

The development of the *Convention* and its adoption 40 years ago reflected a new era of environmental protection and activism both in Australia and overseas. It was and remains a movement that brings people together from across the political, social and economic divide to work together to protect and maintain places precious and important to them and the community.

In Australia, this new environmental activism expressed itself in movements to save and protect iconic places like the Great Barrier Reef, the Franklin River in Tasmania, the Daintree Rainforest and the Alligators Rivers region in the Northern Territory now known as Kakadu National Park.

During this time of fundamental political and social change Australian Governments rose to the challenge of working to provide protection for our iconic World Heritage places. The Great Barrier Reef was World Heritage listed in 1981, South West Tasmania in 1982 (renamed the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage area in 1989), the tropical rainforests of the Daintree in 1988 and Kakadu in 1992. There are currently 19 Australian places on the World Heritage List.

The Australian Government continues to rise to the challenge of fulfilling its obligations under the World Heritage Convention. We welcome the recent decision by the World Heritage Committee on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and its challenge to prove the case for the management of coral reefs around the world in the face of a range of threats.

We know that climate change, declining water quality from catchment runoff, and impacts from coastal development are the priority issues to be addressed

in managing the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park World Heritage Area. Meeting this challenge will not be easy and will require a long-term commitment and it is a commitment the government is willing to make.

The long-term and ongoing management of Australia's World Heritage places is of vital importance to the Australian Government. The government understands that the protection and management of a World Heritage place doesn't end with its inscription on the World Heritage List. We continue to work with landowners, industry, Traditional Owners and other governments within Australia to manage our World Heritage places.

Two years ago the World Heritage Committee added more than 20,000 hectares to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and in June 2012 the World Heritage Committee included the Melaleuca-Cox Bight area, and area of more than 3,000 hectares, to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

In 2011, I had the privilege of being the federal environment minister for the inscription of the Ningaloo Coast on the World Heritage List and seeing the fulfilment of a 30 year promise with the inclusion of the Koongarra area in the Kakadu National Park on the World Heritage List. The inclusion of Koongarra enhances the protection of more than 50,000 years of Indigenous history and culture.

In the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the World Heritage Convention the Australian Government is working towards a World Heritage listing for one of Australia's most remarkable landscapes and environments, that is Cape York Peninsula in far north Queensland. People across Australia have worked to prevent mining in Cape York and in particular Shelburne Bay. Shelburne Bay is a remarkable landscape containing pure white sand dunes of unparalleled beauty.

The Australian Government is committed to putting forward a proposal for the World Heritage listing of Cape York Peninsula to the World Heritage Committee as soon as possible. This commitment is coupled with one made to the Traditional Owners of Cape York Peninsula that a World Heritage nomination will only happen with their consent.

As the celebrations for this significant milestone for World Heritage protection come to an end it is important to reflect on Australia's and the world's major heritage achievements but it is just as important to ensure we keep focussed on the future and continue to work for not only new World Heritage listings but for new and innovative approaches to their management and protection.

The papers and presentations from the Australian Committee for the International Union for Conservation and Nature Symposium in Cairns in August 2012 will challenge our current thoughts and ideas on

The whale shark is the icon species of the abundant marine life of the Ningaloo Coast inscribed on the World Heritage List, June 2011.  
Photo © Axel Passek courtesy DEC.

conservation management and provide us with unique information and ideas to guide and stimulate debate as we move towards the next 40 years of World Heritage.



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As the publication went to print in late June 2013, Minister Burke moved to the portfolio of Minister for Immigration, Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship.

