

Queensland's Commitment to the World Heritage Convention

The Hon Andrew Powell MP

Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection

The theme for this symposium '*Australia's World Heritage: Keeping the Outstanding Exceptional*' is a good basis for discussion. We all have an obligation to keep World Heritage Areas exceptional and to make sure they have a bright future.

World Heritage Areas are outstanding examples of the world's natural and cultural heritage. I'm really proud that five of Australia's 19 World Heritage Areas are right here in Queensland, one of the most naturally diverse places on earth. Cairns is particularly special as it is the only place in the world where two World Heritage areas meet—the Wet Tropics and the Great Barrier Reef.

I count myself very lucky to represent another spectacularly beautiful part of this state, the Glasshouse Mountains. I'm also a father of five and I want my children, and their children, to also be able to visit, see and experience the beauty and wonder of places like this throughout their lifetimes.

As Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP), my role is to act as a strong environmental regulator which supports the sustainable long-term economic development of Queensland. I am responsible for managing the health of the environment to protect Queensland's unique flora and fauna. The Newman government is determined that EHP becomes the benchmark environment and heritage agency in Australia.

Queensland's Environment and World Heritage

The environment portfolio for Queensland is huge. It covers more than 172 million hectares of land, features 6000 kilometres of coastline and contains 1165 offshore islands and little coral islands cays.

Queensland has the greatest level of biodiversity in Australia. We have 85 per cent of the native mammals, 72 per cent of its native birds, more than half of the nation's native reptile and frog species, and close to 13,000 native plant species.

Aside from its intrinsic worth, our biodiversity provides us with important 'services' on which we depend such



Subtropical rainforest in Lamington National Park. Photo © Paul Candlin, Commonwealth of Australia

as fresh water, clean air and the resources needed for industries such as tourism, forestry, fishing and agriculture. For example, the Great Barrier Reef, one of the world's iconic tourist destinations, attracts up to two million visitors each year and contributes more than \$5 billion annually to the Queensland economy.

Managing this state's environmental values effectively and efficiently is a complex undertaking. Here in Queensland, protected areas are established under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 (Qld.) and the state's five World Heritage Areas are jointly managed by the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (NPRSR) and the EHP in partnership with the Australian Government and other states.

Queensland has worked in partnership with the Commonwealth and other States to protect these special places for many years — not always with complete agreement, but always with commitment to their identification, protection, sustainable use and to ensure they have an important part in the life of communities.

Queensland's existing World Heritage Areas

Queensland's five World Heritage Areas have distinctive values and distinctive management challenges. Following is a summary of the issues and challenges the government identifies for each property – and some of our policy and management responses.

Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is a World Heritage Area made up of almost 3000 individual reefs and many coral islands. Covering 35 million hectares, the Reef stretches more than 2000 kilometres along the Queensland coastline and is the world's largest coral reef.

Largely protected in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, state marine parks and national parks, it is home to more than 1500 species of fish, 4000 species of molluscs, 400 species of sponge and 300 species of hard corals.

In 1981, the Great Barrier Reef became Queensland's first World Heritage Area. The Reef is a crucial part of Queensland's extraordinary natural heritage and the Government is committed to ensuring it continues to be one of the best managed marine protected areas in the world.

Queensland, like so many other places, wants to balance the protection of the environment with economic growth, and the reef, strategically positioned within Australia's trade gateway, needs careful management and strong environmental regulation.

The Reef was the focus of a World Heritage monitoring mission during 2012. The mission report was considered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting in St Petersburg in June 2012. I welcome the Committee's decision to not place the Reef on the 'in danger list', following concerns expressed about the impacts of development on its values. The Committee made recommendations about the management strategies for the Reef and noted a number of habitats and species facing particular pressures. A number of these concerns have already been addressed by this government and we will continue to ensure that our planning and management framework represents best environmental management practice.

The Queensland Government is also working with the Australian Government to progress the strategic assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and the adjacent coastal zone, while at the same time removing unnecessary overlap and duplication in development assessment. The strategic assessment will help identify, plan for and manage existing and emerging risks to ensure ongoing protection and management of the unique environmental values of the Reef. The process will also address the concerns raised in the decisions of the World Heritage Committee. It is expected that the assessment will take around 12-18 months to complete. I am confident that we can strike the right balance between environmental protection and ensuring that appropriate development can occur in coastal areas.

Reef water quality is also a priority for the Queensland Government. The Reef is situated alongside valuable agricultural land and is subject to pollutants from farming such as nutrients, pesticides, fertilisers and sediment run-off. We know that to have a healthy reef, you must have a healthy catchment. Without good management of our landscapes and riparian areas, catchments will continue to shed soil, nutrients, pesticides and other pollutants. The Queensland and Australian Governments are jointly investing over \$5 million annually to monitor and model such things as:

- total suspended solids, organic and inorganic nutrients and pesticides
- grass and tree cover across catchments
- post-storm events like fires, cyclones and floods, as this tells us about land condition.

The Queensland Premier has also committed to maintain the \$35 million funding for Reef protection which covers ongoing cane nutrient trials, improved grazing and pesticide management research, extension, monitoring and modelling. Over the first two years, a \$2 million allocation will supercharge agricultural extension



Riversleigh's landscape of semi arid grasslands holds one of the world's richest fossil locations which tell of when the area was rainforest.
Photo © Colin Totterdell, Commonwealth (DSEWPaC)

and \$8 million will support industry partnerships to deliver best management practice frameworks which will ensure our beef and cane production is profitable and the most environmentally responsible in the world.

Wet Tropics

The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area was listed in 1988 and extends from Cooktown to Townsville. It covers almost 900,000 hectares. The Daintree, Barron Gorge and Woornooran National Parks are all included within the area, which protects Australia's most extensive remaining area of wet tropical rainforest. The most diverse in Australia, these rainforests contain a stunning array of plant life on earth and have the highest concentration of primitive flowering plant families in the world.

This World Heritage Area is one of the most diverse and ancient rainforest landscapes on the planet. James Cook University and CSIRO researchers use it as a living laboratory where we are learning much about rainforest ecology and management for application throughout the world.

The Queensland Government has identified tourism as one of the four pillars of the Queensland economy. Here in the Wet Tropics we have an outstanding example of how important World Heritage can be to the

tourism industry and also of the valuable contribution sustainable tourism can make to the presentation of World Heritage values.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority has played a successful leadership role support of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and its communities over the past 20 years.

Fraser Island

Fraser Island is the world's largest sand island and was World Heritage-listed in 1992. The island includes over 250 kilometres of sandy beaches, more than 40 kilometres of coloured sand cliffs, as well as dune blowouts. It is particularly extraordinary as despite being entirely composed of sand it supports tall rainforests and lakes nestled in the massive dunes.

On Fraser Island, the Newman government works closely with the scientific community, traditional owners and the broader community to make sure this iconic place is well managed and that we constantly review that management.

A key issue on Fraser Island is the potential to experience interaction with dingoes. While it is an important part of the island's ecosystem and a drawcard for visitors, there are risks associated with

coming close to wild predator species. That is why the Newman government has this year embarked on a comprehensive and independent review of dingo management on the island, to ensure both safety for visitors and dingo populations.

It also demonstrates our commitment to working closely with the tourism industry to make sure visitors enjoy their stay, do the right thing while they are there and leave with a positive memory.

Gondwana Rainforests

The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area, originally listed in 1986 to cover rainforests in New South Wales, was extended in 1994 to include rainforests on the Queensland side of the border.

It is made up many individual parcels of land that include some spectacular country, covering a total of 366 000 hectares; more than 59 000 hectares is in Queensland. Lamington, Springbrook, Mount Barney and Main Range National Parks are protected areas within Gondwana. Around two million people a year visit this World Heritage Area.

It is home to some ancient and vulnerable species and close to expanding coastal populations, making it highly accessible. This brings with it some extra challenges, for both protection and visitor safety. Day-to-day management of such a vast and complex area needs strong management directions in place.

Queensland works closely with the Commonwealth to manage the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area.
Photo © Commonwealth of Australia (GBRMPA).

That is why the New South Wales, Queensland and Commonwealth Governments are working together to review the strategic overview that guides the management of the property to ensure safe and sustainable access, strong visitor experiences and protection of its ancient values.

Riversleigh Fossil Site

The Australian Fossil Mammal Sites became a World Heritage Area in 1994. NPRSR manages the Riversleigh section, which covers 10,000 hectares of land in the southern section of Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park in north-west Queensland. Riversleigh is an amazing site that helps us unlock some of the mysteries of mammals through the significant fossils found there - among the richest and most extensive in the world.

We work closely with NPRSR traditional owners and scientists to inform management and future directions. The Newman government is also developing an updated interpretation strategy to make sure visitors get the most from their trip and understand why it is on the World Heritage List. Significant resources have also gone into better visitor facilities to make their stay more enjoyable.

Diverse as they are, when I consider the range of World Heritage Properties in Queensland, I think of the important principles that have contributed to their success, such as:



- strong systems of community engagement, ensuring the community has a real say in management and develops a sense of ownership and support
- effective planning and regulatory systems that ensure the Outstanding Universal Value of the properties is considered in decision-making
- partnerships between researchers and managers to ensure the best possible information is available for decision making
- strong collaborations between the governments and agencies that have a role in management, and
- active programs to ensure a close connection between the community and the World Heritage Area.

If we can continue to pursue these principles for our current and any future world heritage areas, we anticipate a very positive future.

Cape York Peninsula

The potential for a World Heritage nomination of areas of Cape York Peninsula is under active consideration by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments. Extensive consultation is already underway with community groups, traditional owners, local government and industry on a nomination and the identification of outstanding values.

Together with this work, the Newman Government is committed to the development of a Bioregion Management Plan for the Cape York Peninsula. The Cape York Bioregional Management Plan will provide protection for the Peninsula's precious natural environment while allowing for appropriate development opportunities. The Plan will be the statutory regional plan for the Cape. The Cape York Plan will incorporate management of pristine waterways and the protected estate and set real natural resource management targets—all allowing for an integrated approach to the conservation of natural heritage values. The plan will identify, in consultation with Indigenous communities, industry and other landholders, the optimum mix of land use on the Cape, to provide increased certainty for all.

The plan will form a valuable part of the management arrangements for a world heritage area, should a nomination be successful. We are interested in hearing people's views on potential boundaries and suitable management arrangements for a possible future world heritage area.

Conclusion

Queensland has a long standing commitment to the protection of World Heritage Areas going back to 1981 with the listing of the Great Barrier Reef.

We boast the greatest levels of biodiversity in Australia. This is an important part of what makes Queensland a special place to live and provides us with a range of services including the basis for industries such as tourism, forestry, fishing and agriculture.

While these services are important to our economy the government remains committed to ensuring their development is in harmony with strong protection of the environment. We want World Heritage Areas and other places to remain in place for future generations to enjoy.

We will continue working in partnership with the Commonwealth and other States when it comes to the identification, protection and sustainable use of these special places.

This 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention is a perfect time to celebrate and reflect on the part that we all play in keeping outstanding areas around the world exceptional.

Author

Andrew Powell is the Queensland Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and the State Member for Glass House.

Biography

Before being sworn in as Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection in April 2012, Mr Powell held various parliamentary roles including the Shadow Spokesperson for the Environment and member of the Environment, Agriculture, Resources and Energy Committee. Mr Powell was also previously a member of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee and served on the panel of Temporary Speakers in the chamber.

Mr Powell's experience before becoming a Member of Parliament in 2009 includes a number of years in public sector roles. This includes work for the Queensland Department of Child Safety (2005–09) and the Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet (2001–04). In his earlier career, Mr Powell worked in Fiji and New Zealand (2000) and for the Commonwealth Department of Defense (1996–2000), where he gained experience in international relations, human resources and financial management.

Born in Melbourne in 1973, Mr. Powell holds a Bachelor of Science and Arts from the University of Queensland and a Certificate III in Public Administration from the Department of Defense.