

Australia's achievements and legacy on the World Heritage Committee

Paul Murphy

Australia's term on the World Heritage Committee (the Committee) between 2007 and 2011 contributed to the strengthening of the integrity of the World Heritage Convention (the convention) and the continued engagement of Asia and the Pacific with World Heritage. Future challenges and opportunities remain, including implementing and monitoring the Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the Convention 2012-2022 (UNESCO, 2011), maintaining momentum in World Heritage capacity building activities in Asia and the Pacific, and reconnecting Advisory Body recommendations with decisions taken by the Committee. Australia has a role to play in addressing these challenges and in identifying further opportunities to improve the operation of the Convention.

Australia's World Heritage Committee term

Australia's credentials as a member of the Committee (2007-2011) are strong. Australia is a first rate manager of our World Heritage properties. We are also a constructive and valued party to the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (the Convention), and have played a leadership role in building World Heritage capacity in our region; especially in Pacific Island Countries. These aspects are interrelated in a number of ways. Australia's successful management of its World Heritage properties contributes to its credibility as a party to the Convention and its ability to lend assistance to other states parties in our region. Similarly, Australia's contribution to the World Heritage system on the international stage creates trust that we will deliver on our obligations in relation to our domestic World Heritage properties.

Strengthening the World Heritage Convention

Australia's recent Committee term focused on strengthening the integrity of the Convention as a constructive and valuable contribution to the Convention's future. The Australian contribution included increasing the merit basis of the operations of the Convention, and seeking to improve the governance frameworks surrounding the Convention through operational reform and policy development.

Australia's contribution to operational reform included initiating and securing a mandate for the process of Reflection on the Future of the Convention (Futures Process) as a major outcome of the 32nd session of the Committee (Quebec, 2008). Australia co-sponsored the first major international meeting on the future of the Convention (February, 2009) and expert meetings on priority areas including improving processes prior to the



Jelly fish lake Rock Islands of Palau World Heritage Area. Photo © Helen Pippard



nomination of properties ('upstream processes'), decision-making procedures, and state of conservation issues. Australia participated in a working group on procedures for Committee member election, which, in 2011, resulted in amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

We were also involved in the drafting of the Strategic Action Plan 2012-2022 (UNESCO, 2009) which set out six specific goals to assist in structuring the work of the Convention over the next ten years. In addition we supported changes to the Operational Guidelines to simplify their use and implementation. We chaired the inaugural finance working group to respond to

pressures on the World Heritage Fund, and contributed to developing the format for the second cycle of periodic reporting.

Australia has also contributed to broader policy development initiatives, including co-hosting the international workshop on sustainable tourism at heritage sites in Mogao, China (2009) which resulted in a statement defining the relationship between World Heritage and tourism being adopted by the Committee in 2010. The Committee adopted the *World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme* arising from this process in 2012 (UNESCO, 2012). We also sponsored and were involved in the working group of a World Heritage 'brand audit'. Australia also acted as rapporteur for the expert meeting on World Heritage



and buffer zones in Switzerland in 2008 and contributed to a refined policy approach focusing on protecting values, rather than places.

Engagement with Asia and the Pacific

Australia is proud of its role in supporting World Heritage activities in Asia and the Pacific during its recent term on the Committee and looks forward to continuing this work. During our period on the Committee, and with our assistance, the number of World Heritage properties in Pacific Island Countries increased from one to five. Australia's assistance has also focused on developing expertise and governance arrangements in the region that assist in the sustainable management of properties, once listed.

Australia's assistance in the Pacific has included the establishment of a AUD 3.3 million UNESCO Australian Funds-In-Trust (AFIT) to support regional training and capacity-building activities, including four Pacific World Heritage workshops in Tongariro (2007), Cairns (2008), French Polynesia (2009), and Samoa (September 2011), and funding Pacific representatives to attend heritage training at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in Japan. Through the AFIT, Australia supported Pacific Island Country representatives to attend Committee meetings in 2008, 2010 and 2011.

We also provided direct assistance to the successful nominations of the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (Kiribati), Bikini Atoll (Marshall Islands) and Rock Islands

Southern Lagoon (Palau), as well as a possible future nomination of the Ancient Capitals of the Kingdom of Tonga. AFIT funding has also contributed to the Angkor Heritage Management Framework in Cambodia. Seed funding from the AFIT has been committed for the Pacific Heritage Hub, to be located at the University of the South Pacific campus in Suva, Fiji. The Pacific Heritage Hub is a priority regional activity under the Pacific World Heritage Action Plan 2015 (UNESCO, 2009), adopted by the Committee in 2009. It aims to strengthen heritage in Pacific Island Countries, increase communication networks, coordinate training opportunities and bring together donors and projects in the region.

Through AusAID's Pacific Public Sector Linkages Program (AUD 1 million), Australia has also provided long term assistance to Pacific World Heritage properties by building the capacity of the governments and communities which manage them. This has included strengthening governance in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, and site maintenance and heritage tourism infrastructure at Chief Roi Mata's Domain, Vanuatu. Australia continues to provide substantial assistance for related activities in Asia and the Pacific.

Australia assisted in the listing of the beautiful Rock Islands Southern Lagoon World Heritage Area. Photo © Stuart Chape



Future challenges and opportunities

Despite the achievements during Australia's recent term on the Committee, a number of activities and initiatives remain works in progress. These will require the continued efforts of Australia and like-minded states parties, together with governments, communities and managers of World Heritage properties. With Australia's term on the Committee having come to an end, there is a risk that we could lose some of the momentum we have helped to build in the region. There is also recognition that despite recent gains, most Pacific Island Countries struggle to engage with, and share in the benefits of, World Heritage recognition and protection.

Opportunities to address these challenges include working with other states parties, and particular Committee members, to implement and monitor the Strategic Action Plan 2012-2022. Australia continues to work with governments, communities and managers in our region on identification, nomination and management of World Heritage properties, with projects receiving Australian assistance continuing in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga. Australia will maintain its involvement in central reform processes and regional activities.

A further challenge that has become particularly apparent at the most recent 2012 Committee meeting in St Petersburg, Russia, is the growing disjunct between the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies, IUCN and ICOMOS, and the decisions of the Committee regarding nominations. There may be opportunities to improve this aspect of the process, which lies at the heart of the credibility of the World Heritage system. There are certainly risks if nothing is done.

Conclusion

Australia's 2007-2011 World Heritage Committee term has reinforced Australia's reputation as an international leader in strengthening the integrity of the Convention, and one that has contributed expertise to improve the policies that conserve World Heritage. Australia has supported our region's engagement with World Heritage and helped to increase the region's share in the cultural, economic and social benefits of World Heritage recognition and protection. Our recent contribution has continued the prominent role Australia has played in the Convention since its adoption (DSEWPaC, 2011). Nevertheless, there are a range of challenges and opportunities for further improvement that demand our continued active engagement with the World Heritage system.

References

- UNESCO (2008). *World Heritage Papers 25: World Heritage and Buffer Zones*. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/events/473/> [accessed 12 September 2012].
- UNESCO (2009). *Pacific World Heritage Action Plan 2010-2015*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Apia/pdf/event-609-2.pdf> [Accessed 12 September 2012].
- UNESCO (2011). *Strategic Action Plan for the future of the World Heritage Convention*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2011/whc11-18ga-11-en.pdf> [Accessed 12 September 2012].
- UNESCO (2012). *World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris. Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/669/> [Accessed 12 September 2012].
- DSEWPaC (2011). *Australia's 2007-2011 World Heritage Committee Term*. Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Canberra. Available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/pubs/07-11-whc-term.pdf> [Accessed 12 September 2012].

Author

Paul Murphy

Assistant Secretary, Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
PO Box 787, Canberra ACT 2601
Paul.Murphy@environment.gov.au

Biography

Paul Murphy is an Assistant Secretary in the Heritage and Wildlife Division of the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities. Paul's branch oversees Australia's implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the Kokoda Initiative, natural and cultural heritage in Northern Australia and the preparation of a World Heritage nomination for Cape York Peninsula. Paul has extensive experience as a senior natural resource manager in the Australian and NSW governments. For most of Paul's public service career he has worked in fisheries management. Paul joined the former Heritage Division in 2010.