

Managing World Heritage in Australia: trends, issues and achievements

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The 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention (the Convention) offers an opportune time to highlight some of the key trends, issues and achievements in Australian World Heritage management. As part of the *Keeping the Outstanding Exceptional* symposium, the ACIUCN commissioned a snapshot report to provide a voice for on-ground managers in Australia (Razian & Zischka 2012). A questionnaire designed around key obligations of the Convention investigated five thematic areas of World Heritage management - governance, resources, capacity building, community engagement, and key opportunities and threats. This paper highlights some of the key findings presented in the snapshot report, as described through manager responses for fourteen of the sixteen Australian World Heritage areas listed for their outstanding 'natural' and 'mixed' (natural/cultural) values.

Governance

In Australia, there is no single governing body for the management of World Heritage areas. Rather, management is carried out under one of three management arrangements: by the Commonwealth Government, by individual States, or by joint management. Of the sixteen areas, one - the Heard and McDonald Islands - is managed solely by the Commonwealth Government through the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) (DSEWPaC, 2013). Four areas have joint management arrangements between either the Commonwealth Government and Aboriginal Traditional Owners, or the Commonwealth Government and State management authorities. The former includes the Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park World Heritage areas, jointly managed by the Commonwealth Government through the Director of Parks Australia and a Board of Management consisting of an Aboriginal majority representing traditional owners. The latter includes both the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA), jointly managed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and the Queensland Government, and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA) jointly managed by the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) and the Queensland Government. The remaining eleven World Heritage areas are managed by respective state agencies, and in the case of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, jointly by New South Wales and Queensland (DSEWPaC, 2013).

Operational management falls largely under the jurisdiction of agencies responsible for the administration of national parks and reserves. When asked what key factors differentiate World Heritage management from protected area management more generally, managers highlighted the



responsibility of protecting and conserving the internationally significant Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for which the site was listed. In this regard, managers stressed the central role that the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* (EPBC Act) plays in providing a legislative framework for effective World Heritage area management. At the site-specific level, strategic management plans and documents, as well as guidance from management and scientific advisory bodies such as the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC) and the Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network (AWHIN), support the achievement of Convention objectives. Additionally, increased intergovernmental coordination between management authorities was identified as an opportunity to be leveraged to further facilitate and support effective management.

Resources

The financial resources underpinning World Heritage management are critical for ensuring effective management outcomes. Feedback from managers regarding resource allocation shows that funding availability for management varies according to the jurisdiction, visitation rates and commercial activities

carried out within an area. Overall, managers reported that funding largely meets requirements for current management, although strategic investment in key operational areas, such as invasive control, would allow for improved performance. It should be noted that it is unlikely managers would be comfortable commenting publicly on the inadequacy of government funding.

The majority of funding for management is provided through Commonwealth and State agency budgets. Revenue collection activities, licensing fees and leases, and private donations and partnerships supplement this funding, but generally only to a minor degree. After Commonwealth and State Government sources, revenue collection was identified as the third highest funding stream. In those areas where tourism is a viable option, revenue collection provides an excellent opportunity for increasing funding to the site, although potential financial and ecological costs resulting from additional visitation must be carefully considered and managed. Managers reported that less than one percent of World Heritage budgets are derived from partnerships with the private sector. With such a low percentage, developing strategic public private partnerships has the potential to provide funds that supplement current budgets for investing in key operational areas.

Ningaloo Coast World Heritage Area protects a rich array of marine life.
Photo © Axel Passek courtesy DEC.



Capacity Building

The Convention obligations include supporting the capacity of staff to effectively discharge their functions in management; the establishment of national or regional training centres; and the implementation of scientific and technical studies. Although no single training or education centre exists for World Heritage in Australia, several partnerships have been established to facilitate training and research programs as part of management strategies. Managers highlighted achievements in this area through case studies of training, and scientific and technical research programs.

Partnerships for training and education are being developed with a range of World Heritage stakeholders including government, non-government organisations (NGO), and tourism operators. These provide an opportunity to create and share effective management strategies for protecting, conserving and communicating OUV to the public. Managers highlighted a selection of successful partnerships including recently established ranger training programs in the Kakadu and Uluru Kata-Tjuta World Heritage areas, as well as the *Reef Ed* community engagement program in the GBRWHA. Similar to trends in funding, Commonwealth and State Governments also play a central role in World Heritage training and education programs, with the tourism sector reported as ranking third highest in active partnerships. Partnerships between the public sector and the tourism industry include the recently established World Heritage tour guide training program between WTMA and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC). Further case studies can be found in the project snapshot report (Razian & Zischka 2012).

Scientific and technical research partnerships and programs provide managers and staff with the capacity to monitor the natural and cultural values within World Heritage areas, and to respond to potential threats. Key partnerships have been established between governing bodies and local or national academic institutions for facilitating scientific and technical research, and with Indigenous communities and NGOs involved in a largely advisory capacity. Here too, private sector partnerships were under-represented. Case studies include long-term vegetation projects on Macquarie Island and remote sensing studies on the Heard and McDonald Islands through the AAD; monitoring programs in the Tasmanian Wilderness through the University of Tasmania; palaeological research in Naracoorte through Flinders University; and dugong monitoring with the Yadgalah Aboriginal Corporation in Shark Bay.

Managers highlighted the potential of using training opportunities to facilitate future initiatives for improving the broader understanding of OUV as a concept, how OUV can be more effectively communicated to the public, and how it might be applied to management. In this regard, developing partnerships for training with the private sector provides mutually beneficial opportunities for sharing communications and management expertise. The expansion of training and education programs offers an added opportunity to share best practice management skills nationally within the Australian World Heritage network, as well as internationally within the Asia Pacific region and beyond. Regional information sharing was conducted through a 2010/2011 Periodic Reporting training workshop for four Pacific Island countries, run by WTMA and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPoC).

Community Engagement

Although innovative forms of community engagement and partnerships exist and are proving successful, there is potential for greater uptake of these kinds of projects to increase the function of World Heritage in the life of the community – another Convention obligation. When questioned about the level of stakeholder participation in decision-making, the majority of respondents indicated that stakeholders were ‘involved’. That is, managers are working with the public to understand and consider their perceptions. Responses identifying community participation in operational procedures mimic this trend. Respondents noted the importance of communications with local and regional communities and industries, and where no local community is present, with the broader Australian public. In this regard, partnership development with communities to leverage sustainable tourism, support indigenous rights and cultural traditions, as well as undertaking research, education and volunteerism activities, have been identified as key opportunities in supporting the obligation to give World Heritage a function in the life of the community (see chapter by Scherl). Investment in communication and outreach activities that actively involve stakeholders in decision-making and operations could facilitate improved relationships and support for World Heritage management programs.

Opportunities and threats

Although a history of conflict over World Heritage listing in Australia has served to propel the World Heritage brand into the spotlight and achieve significant protections, it has also stirred opposition and propagated a degree of perception in some quarters



Managing visitation on fragile environments like Fraser Island remains a central challenge of managers. Photo © Shannon Muir, Commonwealth of Australia

that protection may conflict with the social, cultural and economic vitality of local and regional communities (Leask and Fyall, 2006). Innovative and strategic partnerships with tourism operators and the private sector that ensure better communication of both the meaning and multiple values of World Heritage could help dispel this perception.

World Heritage areas can also provide the platform through which innovative and sustainable economies can develop. This is particularly true in terms of increasing employment of Indigenous communities to manage land and sea country using both traditional management practices and knowledge sharing and also interpretation of the cultural meaning of their country in tourism operations.

Importantly, an opportunity exists to leverage skills and expertise by sharing successes and lessons learnt through communication and training exchanges across the network. However this means that agencies need to commit to both face to face and other ways of encouraging such exchanges.

Conclusions: Leveraging Networks and Partnerships

The study provided an opportunity to investigate some of the trends, issues and achievements across a broad level of Australian World Heritage Area management. Based on the analysis of findings, recommendations were proposed to bolster World Heritage success in Australia. Managers have the opportunity to leverage the World Heritage brand by exploring innovative and mutually beneficial partnerships to increase the function of World Heritage in the life of the community. Further

opportunity also exists to develop and engage in strategic partnerships with key sectors - tourism, local communities and the private sector – to further elevate the World Heritage brand. Working towards strengthening active Indigenous engagement in World Heritage areas will continue to deliver positive results. Finally, it is important that managers have opportunities to effectively leverage existing expertise within the World Heritage network by sharing lessons learnt in implementing Convention obligations, in order to facilitate best practice management of our World Heritage in the future.

References

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Kathy Zischka works in marine and environmental conservation and management, and has held positions with NGOs, academic institutions, government, and in the international aid and development sector. Recently, Kathy has consulted for Greenpeace International, prior to which she worked at the government Ministry of Environment and Climate Change in the Kingdom of Tonga advising on marine conservation issues for an AusAID capacity building program. Since 2005, Kathy has worked in NGO whale shark research; in academia at the University of Western Australia; and in ecotourism on the Ningaloo and Great Barrier Reefs. She has volunteered for Greenpeace Australia Pacific, the WA Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), the NZ Department of Conservation (DoC), and coral reef research NGO Operation Wallacea. Kathy has initiated collaborative research on legislative gap analysis work for marine protected areas in Tonga, and seeks to further implement her skills and experience in international environmental law and policy, marine research, and environmental management, within the environmental conservation and natural resource management sectors.

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