

# Managing Australia's World Heritage: A Summary of Key Questions and Expert Responses

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A major session of the symposium was built around managing World Heritage. The session commenced with a case study of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and how the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (the Authority) is addressing the issues raised by the UNESCO Great Barrier Reef Mission Report (UNESCO, 2012), (see Day chapter). This was followed by short presentations from a series of Australian World Heritage senior managers highlighting both achievements and challenges in honouring their World Heritage commitment. The session then discussed the questions below. The following is an edited synthesis of the breakout session responses.

## **How do you establish the OUV of a property as “a clearly defined and central element and management system within the protection for the property”?**

- The starting point is the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SoOUV) when the property is inscribed on the World Heritage List. The retention of the qualities outlined in the Statement needs to be the guiding force of all management.
- Before the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) can be properly reflected in any management system the Statement needs to be broken into its component parts - that is the key values and attributes. This has in fact been done by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (see Day).
- While the OUV identifies global significance, its components need equal emphasis ensuring no key value is lost or overlooked.
- Other values of the World Heritage Area (WHA), which are not directly identified as subcomponents of the OUV, but are integral to the property, should also be identified.
- Once identified these values and components need to guide the development of a Management Plan or other system of management. The content of the Plan will be the identification of what processes and actions are needed to protect all components of OUV and other key values of the property.
- A Management Plan should:
  - identify indicators of successful outcomes;
  - identify triggers or decisions that affect OUV;
  - identify triggers or decisions that affect other values;
  - identify thresholds for significant impact or cumulative impacts.







Crimson Rosella, Blue Mountains, Photo © P. Figgis

- identify threats and critical interventions to address threats.
- develop systems for managing, monitoring and adapting interventions.
- be integrated into all relevant planning instruments and legislative frameworks for surrounding or buffer zones to try to mitigate threats beyond the ‘boundary’ or influence of the property.

**How might properties develop “clearly defined and scientifically justified targets for the condition of the OUV”?**

- In developing ‘clearly defined and scientifically justified targets’ there was agreement on the need to disaggregate the OUV into measurable components and develop targets for each.
- OUV itself is an intergenerational concept and therefore targets need development as steps towards long term goals.
- It is also necessary to decide what is the ‘end goal’ - what condition are we aiming to achieve, and what is the baseline? The original inscription criteria and date of World Heritage listing should be taken as a primary reference baseline, but with acceptance that restoration of parts of the property may still be needed on the basis of research into past condition.
- In developing targets there is a need to acknowledge that ‘condition’ usually reflects many factors requiring a need to prioritise interventions.
- Urgency factors, such as the arrival of a new invasive species threat, need to be planned for with rapid assessment and action responses identified.
- Targets need to be developed in the context of improved evaluation of cumulative impacts given most environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures and regulatory frameworks are inadequate.
- The following key principles were identified. Targets should:
  - be part of maintaining the ‘authenticity and/or integrity’ of the property as a whole;
  - be based on baseline data gathered before inscription;
  - identify the presence or absence of particular elements;
  - determine if the target ‘condition’ is restoration or remediation;
  - determine when considering goals for components whether the aim is quantity or quality;
  - be developed through multi/interdisciplinary processes;
  - include not only scientific but socio/cultural advice and input;
  - involve managers and advisory committees with stakeholders and local communities;
  - appreciate sociocultural differences in stakeholder values and perceptions;

- ensure stakeholder awareness and understanding of OUV through community engagement, participation, education programs and empowerment;
- incorporate changes in Indigenous community values;
- be part of periodic reporting and adaptive management.

### How might properties measure the condition, trends, threats and prospects for the OUV of the property, including integrity?

- Integrity was interpreted as meaning ‘everything needed to make the property complete, properly managed and to retain its identified values’.
- In understanding ‘condition’ there was a vital role for traditional cultural knowledge and practices as this knowledge can provide a more holistic understanding of ‘condition’ and integrity.
- The managing authority should:
  - identify relevant measurable criteria against each of the natural or cultural values which are reflected in the OUV;
  - enhance capacity of partners to monitor the property through building partnerships with and between universities, non-government organisations (NGO) and government agencies and groups who operate community observation networks;
  - include both traditional knowledge management systems and scientific management systems equally in identifying the targets;
  - ensure Traditional Owners who know and understand the country have a strong role in monitoring;
  - incorporate consideration and processes to measure condition outside the boundaries as this will almost always affect the condition within property boundaries.

### How might cumulative impacts on the OUV be assessed?

- As the primary means of addressing the vexed question of cumulative impacts there was strong support for strategic planning at a scale that also includes lands or seas which could impact on the property itself.
- Strategic plans should enable the assessment of impacts at relevant ecological scale to both values and threats. It would also allow for more adequate multi-layered and synergistic impacts to be factored into planning.

- This form of planning should gather expert opinion from scientific, traditional and cultural knowledge, to understand complex interactions and inform scenarios. It should also use modelling technology when and if available.
- Any assessment of cumulative impacts needs to identify a base line, which should be the date of inscription as a minimum.
- The Plan should wherever possible identify ‘no go’ zones or clearly prohibited activities to permanently exclude unacceptable proposals from being made at all and/or to assist decision makers to resist pressure for inappropriate developments.
- Such ‘no go’ zones might be facilitated by the uses of “Limits of Acceptable Change” (LAC) indicators for early warning and avoidance of further problems. These LAC thresholds should be social/cultural as well as ecological. A good example would be the issue of tourists climbing Uluru where the objection is not based on ecological damage but the undermining of cultural values and perceptions.
- In considering development proposals the ‘precautionary approach’ is essential given the importance of Australia’s World Heritage Areas.

### How might properties determine what might be “a net benefit to a property as a whole” when considering proposals for development applications?

- Participants were somewhat sceptical that it is possible in many cases to ensure a true ‘net benefit’ from certain developments. They held that there needs to be acceptance by society that certain values are irreplaceable and cannot be ‘offset’ if destroyed or damaged. This is true of both natural and cultural values – once damaged or destroyed they are lost forever, and are therefore a loss to all generations and defy the purpose of the Convention.
- There are also major threshold issues. If a key value, say the presence of an endangered species, is vulnerable then it may be appropriate that no development should occur.
- One suggestion to enhance public understanding and scientific assessment was to apply the concept of a ‘total budget’ of a WHA. For example, for the Great Barrier Reef coral cover is a key component of OUV. Having lost 50% of the available coral cover ‘budget’, the benchmark becomes that no development should be permitted which would result in more loss of coral cover.
- The concept of ‘integrity’ is also important in considering if it is possible to generate a benefit from developments. Developments may not be on a large

scale but may be the 'scratch on the face of the Mona Lisa', depending on their siting and impacts.

- Any development – port, town, resort, pipeline etc. should be required by law and policy to follow 'World's Best Practice' (WBP) in avoidance of negative impacts.
- Offsets, where appropriate, should be in addition to the best possible development practices. Various principles were advanced for offsets:
  - There must be real benefits to the OUV of the WHA, not only to industry public relations or other benefit. False offsets and community buy-offs must be prevented.
  - Net benefits need to be outcomes-based not process-based. An example would be an offset which generated a measurable and significant area of reforestation, as opposed to a public education campaign, which may or may not have real outcomes.
  - When considering the 'development' to be offset, impacts which flow directly from the development, such as increased shipping, should also be subject to both WBP and offsets. For example in the case of the Great Barrier Reef, the Queensland oil and gas developments will necessitate major increases in shipping. Offsets might cover compulsory pilots or a levy on all ships which could be returned to the management of the WHA.
  - Offsets could be sited outside the WHA e.g. in catchments, if they yield clear benefits to OUV within the WHA.
  - A multi-participatory process is needed to develop an acceptable offset.
  - For offsets it must be the World Heritage property manager who establishes the offset threshold, not the development proponent.
  - Cultural offsets need to be determined by the affected community – they are the only ones that can establish if any net benefit is possible and what that might be.

### **How do properties incorporate the social, cultural and economic context in supporting and sustaining the OUV?**

- Overall good inclusive governance structures and processes were seen as the key determinants of how social, cultural and economic values are taken into account in management of the OUV.
- Aspects of good governance include: adequately resourced engagement structures, protocols and practices to facilitate dialogue with stakeholders and communities; especially Traditional Owners.

- Genuine community engagement requires commitment to facilitate equitable participation through early and frequent communication and the commitment to share research and knowledge across all sectors.
- Inclusive processes require the provision of adequate resources and staffing levels at property, state and national World Heritage management levels.
- It was seen as vital for all parties in World Heritage management to acknowledge and promote Indigenous lands/seas, 'Healthy Country, healthy people' and vice versa to deepen the understanding of links between environmental values, a strong economy and community wellbeing.
- World Heritage properties themselves should not be 'bubbles', but managed as integrative parts of landscapes which have strong associations for many people and cultures.
- Stories, from all cultural perspectives, need to be retained and valued as part of management knowledge.
- Managers need to invest in long term relationships with Indigenous owners as more stable links will improve the capacity of managers to listen, hear and understand all the voices and will enhance more robust management arrangements.
- The principle of 'free, prior and informed consent' of Indigenous landowners to World Heritage declarations on their country was supported as a key principle in management arrangements and implementation.
- The obligation to consider World Heritage values needs to be inserted in many other planning and compliance documents.
- All government departments need to be 'educated' on the meaning of World Heritage so that it is seen as a deep national commitment.

### **How might "sharing best practises and success stories" be undertaken?**

- A key requirement for the sharing of good practice is to provide confirmed, consistent resourcing for the existing national consultative bodies – the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC) and the Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network (AWHIN). These committees hold the potential to both generate and distribute best practice and success stories.
- AWHAC and AWHIN need real commitment to continuity and stability of resourcing and staffing to build trusted relationships for both property advisory committees and national structures.





Stone pagodas in the rain. Photo © P. Figgis

- All agencies should develop strong extension and interpretive programmes to tell the stories and engage with the broader society.
- We need to continue enhancing the role of the tourism industry in telling the stories about the values of World Heritage through programs such as National Landscapes.
- Programs to engage younger generations to become active in on ground World Heritage management should be developed to generate ownership and a sense of ongoing responsibility.
- Education and communication efforts need to be monitored and adapted to remain effective and also acknowledge the different ways communities form values.

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### Biography

Penelope Figgis AO is the Director, Australian Committee for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (ACIUCN) and Vice Chair, Oceania of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas.

Penelope has made significant contributions to environmental policy in Australia through governance of NGOs, writing, policy development, advocacy and public speaking. She was the national lobbyist of the key national NGO, the Australian Conservation Foundation in the 1980s and later served seventeen years as Vice President of the governing Council.

Penelope has served many years on government and non-government bodies including the boards of Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park, Australian Tourist Commission, Environment Protection Authority of New South Wales, Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council, Great Barrier Reef Consultative Committee, Landcare Australia, Australian Bush Heritage Fund, Nature Conservation Council of NSW and the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust.

She has been awarded Member of the Order of Australia (1994), Centenary Medal (2000), Officer of the Order of Australia (2006) and the Sir Edmund Hillary Parks Award (2010) for her work in conservation.