

The Role and Importance of the Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network (AWHIN) in achieving Best Practice Management of World Heritage in Australia.

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Although only a handful of Australian World Heritage sites are listed for a mixture of their natural and cultural heritage and the three cultural listings celebrate post-settlement heritage, almost all of Australia's most special places are living cultural landscapes with deep ongoing connections with Australia's Indigenous people.

Australian governments have very diverse approaches to the engagement of Traditional Owners in the management of their Country. It has become increasingly evident that best practice management of the natural and cultural heritage of Australian properties would benefit from more extensive Indigenous participation and a national perspective about such complex issues (see also Grant and Talbot chapters).

One response from the Australian Government was to support the formation of an Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network (AWHIN) which met in 2002 and 2004. Inactive for several years, it was resurrected in October 2007 in the lead up to 2nd National Indigenous Land and Sea Conference in Cardwell.

Subsequent restructuring of Australian World Heritage governance arrangements in 2008 established the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC) to advise the Environmental Protection and Heritage Council and included formal membership on AWHAC of two AWHIN representatives.

AWHIN's early years have been characterised by lack of funding and administrative support and hence difficulties in getting together face to face to deliver on its objectives and the aspirations of its participants. The Network appears to have an uncertain future – but the need has never been greater for a strong national voice for Australia's Indigenous peoples in management of their World Heritage properties.



Australia's World Heritage Areas are strongholds of species like the saltwater crocodile.
Photo © Michelle McAulay, Commonwealth of Australia

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in 2007 and the growing emphasis on the centrality of the principle of 'free, prior and informed consent' of indigenous people in the management of World Heritage (Larsen, 2012) has given added impetus for more appropriate engagement by Indigenous Australians in such matters.

Who is involved in AWHIN and what is its role?

The Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network exists to provide a voice for Traditional Owners and facilitate appropriate Indigenous involvement in the management of Australian World Heritage Areas. Its membership includes at least two Indigenous leaders drawn from every World Heritage property in Australia with Traditional Owner groups.

The scope and importance of AWHIN's role is exemplified by its Terms of Reference. An interim set were endorsed by the October 2008 AWHIN meeting held at Katoomba, NSW and after further property-based discussion led by their AWHIN representatives, the original six goals were revised at the 2010 Broken Hill AWHIN meeting.

A Preamble indicates that AWHIN supports the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 61/295 on 13 September 2007.

AWHIN is a network of Traditional Owners of Australian World Heritage properties whose overall goal is to provide and promote:

- An Indigenous perspective on management of Australian World Heritage properties and advice on how best to incorporate Indigenous traditional knowledge into management.
- A forum to discuss Indigenous issues and share information and experiences relating to Australian World Heritage properties.
- Recognition of Indigenous rights and interests for Australian World Heritage properties and to foster culturally appropriate engagement of Indigenous people in the management of Australian World Heritage properties.

AWHIN will provide this by:

- Networking and mentoring opportunities for AWHIN representatives.
- Disseminating and facilitating the flow of information, discussion and feedback between AWHAC, Traditional Owners, communities and government agencies.

- Establishing formal linkages with the Indigenous Advisory Committee and other relevant Indigenous advisory mechanisms.
- Advising on research, monitoring and other information requirements of relevance to TOs
- Provides this perspective to the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (or its successor) through the nomination of two AWHIN representatives to the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC)

Amended in a closed session, the TOR indicated AWHIN should meet "on Country" at least once a year plus up to four teleconference meetings. The resource implications of this and the defined roles of the DSEWPaC secretariat support resulted in the Draft Final Minutes showing an Action for the Heritage Division and AWHIN to finalise these at the next AWHIN meeting.

AWHIN's relationship with AWHAC

AWHIN was in existence for six years prior to the formation of AWHAC but once the latter was formed, it clearly need Indigenous advice and guidance and was fortunate to be able to "adopt" AWHIN to deliver this vital element to its activities.

The AWHAC changes to their own TOR about Indigenous Protocols at their first meeting in Sydney in 2009 were a strong indication of the members' view that Indigenous involvement in World Heritage management in Australia was to be a key focus. Right from the start, the input from AWHIN members of AWHAC, combined with the strong concerns/ involvement of the other members ensured that Indigenous matters received a very high priority in the business of the Committee. This approach was warmly championed by both Joan Domicelj, as the inaugural Chair and by her successor Prof. Richard Mackay.

After reviewing its priorities for action, AWHAC set up three Working Groups which included one on Indigenous Engagement and Protocols.

AWHAC regularly made representations on behalf of AWHIN with EPHC through Minutes and Reports and directly with Minister Garrett through a meeting with the Chair and Deputy Chair in October 2009.

AWHIN and the Future

The lack of funding to ensure the continued existence of AWHIN and facilitate its members to meet face to face must be addressed if AWHIN is to deliver consistently and in a timely way on its objectives. The lack of such support led the two Indigenous authors to present a paper at the ACIUCN Symposium entitled "AWHIN –



Indigenous engagement in World Heritage issues in Australia is central to the future
Photo © K. Trapnell, Wet Tropics Images

Effective Indigenous Management – We must be Dreaming”.

The paper highlighted the incredible value we had found in sharing our experiences (both positive and negative) with other Traditional Owners of World Heritage Areas through a national network and the inspiration and empowerment that the TOs received from being listened to and having their views respected at the highest levels of World Heritage governance in Australia. However, it also argued that lack of progress over changes at property level have led to frustration for TOs and for us as their representatives. The lack of consistent financial support for an effective national voice through AWHIN has led to a growing sense of powerlessness and some skepticism about its future. Our presentation summarised the priorities of the TOs of World Heritage Areas as the need for support for: protecting and managing our cultural heritage; looking after Country through real employment opportunities in conservation management; building sustainable businesses; and securing our place in all levels of governance.

It concluded that AWHIN could play a very positive role in assisting with this, and therefore in ‘Closing the Gap’.

The hosting of the World Indigenous Network Conference in Darwin in May 2013 by the Department

of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities has provided the impetus for the provision of Indigenous Heritage Program funding of \$80,000 to support the attendance (including conference registration, travel and accommodation costs) of up to two Indigenous Network representatives from each World Heritage property.

The approval by Minister Burke of this funding has provided AWHIN with the welcome opportunity to meet face to face again for the first time in nearly three years. Indigenous engagement in World Heritage issues in Australia will be greatly enhanced by this and Australia stands to benefit significantly as a nation, both directly in developing best practice World Heritage management - and also in how it is viewed internationally.

Appendix 1. **The Origins of AWHIN and a Timeline of its activities**

2002. The inaugural AWHIN forum, was organized by the then Department of the Environment and Heritage at the Australian World Heritage Managers (AWHM) workshop hosted by the Greater Blue Mountains WHA.

2004. A second forum was conducted at the AWHM in Cairns.

2007. WTMA facilitated two AWHIN meetings associated with the 2nd National Indigenous Land and Sea Conference (8th October at the Mercure Hotel, Cairns and 12th October at the Lyndoch Motor Inn, Cardwell). These meetings were attended by over 50 people including 37 TOs from 11 WHAs (Tasmanian Wilderness, Riversleigh, GBR, Shark Bay, Purnululu, Fraser Island, Greater Blue Mountains, Gondwana rainforests, Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Wet Tropics) and Government representatives from the Commonwealth (DEWR), Queensland, Tasmania, NSW and the NT. They provided a significant opportunity to share stories about Indigenous WH management issues and substantial progress was made towards developing the structure and role of AWHIN that we see today.

2008. 2nd AWHIN Meeting in Katoomba, Greater Blue Mountains (Fri 24th and Mon 27th October). Thirteen resolutions passed including: (i) adopting AWHIN's draft TOR as Interim TOR; (ii) request to Minister Garrett for support for annual face-to-face meeting for AWHIN; (iii) Margaret Freeman (WT) and Hank Horton (Tasmania) nominated as the two AWHIN representatives on AWHAC (two additional representatives were requested); (iv) delegates greatly appreciated the input

of Tom Calma, ATSI Social Justice Commissioner and Race Discrimination Commissioner and were particularly struck by his advice about the importance of international treaties to the work of AWHIN; (v) expressed thanks to the organisers of the weekend at the Living Country Culture Camp at Dunns Swamp and emphasised the importance for AWHIN of meeting on Country to ensure its effectiveness.

2009. AWHIN only able to meet in teleconference. WTMA applied for funding under Caring for Our Country program to host the administration of AWHIN for four years, but was unsuccessful.

2009. 1st AWHAC Meeting, Sydney Opera House (2nd-3rd April) attended by AWHIN representatives Margaret Freeman (WTWHA) and Hank Horton (TWWHA).

2009. 2nd AWHAC Meeting, Uluru, (3rd-4th Sept) (attended by AWHIN representatives M. Freeman and H. Horton).

2010. 3rd AWHAC Meeting Lamington N.P., Gondwana WHA, (11th-13th August). Attended by AWHIN representatives Allison Halliday (WTWHA - replacing MF) and H. Horton.

AWHAC and two AWHIN representatives meet at Uluru. Photo © Alistair Birtles



2010. 3rd AWHIN Meeting, Broken Hill (30th Oct – 1st Nov). Held in conjunction with 3rd National Land & Sea Management Conference, this meeting was attended by TOs from seven WHAs and was particularly focused on finalizing the AWHIN TOR and developing a structure and plan for resourcing the Network. It identified a substantial list of issues about Indigenous People's involvement in the management of WHAs and made 10 unanimous recommendations. Discussion of the future directions for AWHIN clearly demonstrated the need for a Strategic Plan and the two AWHIN representatives on AWHAC were to meet with the Heritage Division to develop a draft.

Funding cuts to the heritage areas of DSEWPC lead to no further face to face meetings for either AWHIN or AWHAC in 2011 or 2012.

References

Larsen, P.B. (2012). IUCN, *World Heritage and Evaluation Processes Related to Communities and Rights*. An independent review prepared for the IUCN World Heritage Programme, IUCN, Switzerland.

Authors

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Biographies

Allison Halliday

A Rainforest Aboriginal woman from the Mulgrave River of Far North Queensland, Allison is of the Malanbarra Clan of the Yidinji Nation. Allison has been actively involved in Aboriginal issues, particularly Native Title, Cultural Heritage and Land Management, since March 1995 when Ministerial Council approved the Terms of Reference for The Review of Aboriginal Involvement in the Management of the Wet Tropics WHA. On 29 April 2005, as Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Negotiating Team for the Rainforest Aboriginal People of the Wet Tropics WHA, Allison officially signed off on the Regional Agreement with both State and Commonwealth Governments, in conjunction with the Tribal Groups of the WTWHA. Allison was also the Acting Executive Officer of the then Aboriginal Rainforest Council. Her role as Executive Officer and a Wet Tropics Board Director was to ensure the Regional Agreement was implemented by the Land Management Agencies and to monitor and review the continued involvement of

Rainforest Aboriginal people in the management of their traditional lands within the WTWHA. In 2008, as one of the AWHIN representatives for the WTWHA, Allison was nominated by AWHIN to represent it nationally on AWHAC.

Hank Horton

Aboriginal people have lived in Tasmania for over 35,000 years and Hank provides a passionate voice as one of their more high profile representatives. He is a certified trainer and assessor with National Job-Link teaching business enterprise/management, motor mechanics and cultural arts. As Manager of the Hobart-based Tasmanian Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, he was one of the founder members of AWHIN and one of the two original AWHIN nominees to represent them on AWHAC. He has therefore played a key role in ensuring that AWHIN concerns are strongly represented at a national level. He is a member of both the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA and the National Parks & Wildlife Advisory Councils and the new Aboriginal Heritage Council formed in late 2012 by the Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage to advise on a wide range of issues associated with the protection and management of Aboriginal heritage in Tasmania.

Dr Alastair Birtles

Alastair is a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Management & Ecotourism in the School of Business, James Cook University, Townsville. UK born, he has a Masters in Zoology from Oxford and a PhD in Marine Biology from JCU. With over 40 years of research experience in tropical environments, he has taught marine biology and zoology and ecologically sustainable tourism at JCU. A founding member of Ecotourism Australia in 1991, he is currently a Director and Deputy Chair of the Board of Wet Tropics Management Authority, Deputy Chair of AWHAC, a Member of the IUCN WCPA and an Honorary Research Fellow at the Museum of Tropical Queensland.