

Australia's World Heritage nominations – What are our missing icons and what can be done to resume progress?

Dr. Geoff Mosley AM

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1972 and the first places were placed in the World Heritage List (List) in 1978. Decisions on World Heritage nominations are made by the World Heritage Committee (Committee) with advice from organisations which include the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

Article 11.1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention requires each State Party “in so far as is possible, to submit to the World Heritage Committee an inventory of property forming the cultural and natural; heritage situated in its territory and suitable for inclusion in the list provided for in paragraph 2 of this article” (UNESCO, 1972).

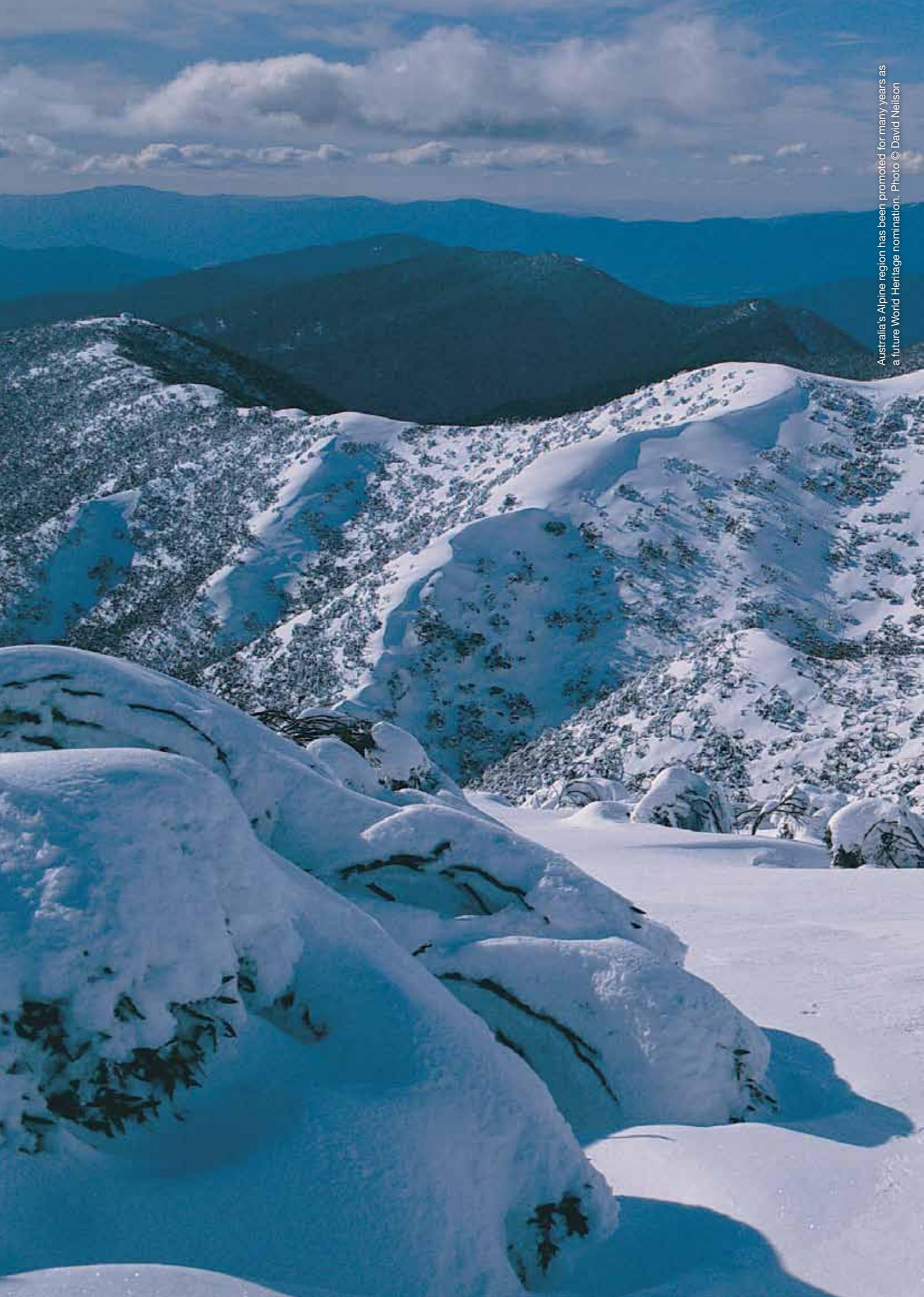
The Australia government did produce such a list in the 1990s, but as the paper explains this has fallen into virtual disuse.

Since 1974 the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), Australia's major national conservation organisation, has had a highly significant role in promoting World Heritage, being a key supporter of most major nominations. During these decades ACF has maintained a list of areas which it believes are deserving of World Heritage nomination for their Outstanding Universal Value (Hutton, 1981). In addition in 1988 the ACF co published a major book on both existing and potential World Heritage Areas (Figgis and Mosley, 1988). In drawing up and adding to its list ACF has consulted widely with other Australian conservation organisations

The Decline in Australia's World Heritage Nominations

Australia has a strong record of identifying and nominating places for the World Heritage List and now has 19 listed places. The responsibility for making nominations lies with the Australian Government which is advised by the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC) on which the States and Territories are represented.

Over the last few years the process of selecting Australian areas for World Heritage nomination has



slowed and now almost halted. This includes the nomination of areas for placement on Australia's Tentative List, a necessary requirement before a nomination is considered by the Committee for listing - see Appendix A.

Australia is a large country globally recognised for its outstanding biodiversity, landscapes and culture. As indicated by the ACF list there are many opportunities for additions to the List to more fully represent the values of the Australian continent, islands and territories.

My main aims are to introduce you to the ACF 'World Heritage Waiting List', to discuss the present situation and especially why the process has slowed, and to suggest a remedy. Tables 1-3 in Appendix A refer to areas placed on the ACF list from 1974 onwards and to inclusion on an Australian Indicative List developed by the federal government between 1991 and 1995. It also refers to an inventory prepared by the IUCN in 1982 which highlighted outstanding natural areas and indicated selection criteria likely to be met (IUCN, 1982).

Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix A trace the lineage of 11 sites on the ACF list, none of which are on Australia's formal Tentative List. The tables reveal that many key heritage sites including Cape York Peninsula, the Eastern Arid Zone, South Western Australia, the Nullarbor, Antarctica and the Alps and Forests have not been nominated for World Heritage listing and are not on Australia's current Tentative List in spite of the fact that in the majority of cases proposals for their listing date back to the 1970s.

Table 2 includes three sites - the Kimberley, the Western Arid Zone and the Tasmanian Wilderness - in which some parts have been included on the List, but where there are major areas within these regions that have been proposed for nomination in the ACF list but whose extensions are also not on Australia's Tentative List.

This does not include the possibility of minor extensions of the existing World Heritage Areas in Table 2, which can be nominated without having to go through the preliminary process of inclusion on the country's Tentative List. In the case of Arnhem Land and the Great Barrier Reef there are also extensions which have been proposed that are not under consideration by government for nomination). There is also the possibility of a major extension to the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and of course there are other areas, including some with cultural values, which may well be proposed in the future.

Today Australia's formal Tentative List comprises extensions to just two sites - the Gondwana Rainforests

and the Great Sandy Region, both added in 2010 (Table 3). The official advice is that these are the only sites agreed to be forwarded to the World Heritage Committee for listing over the next ten years.

Appendix B. discusses the international procedures and the role of tentative lists. It is worth noting that, in contrast, both the United Kingdom and the USA have 13 sites on their respective Tentative Lists.

Why the slow down?

I think it is fair to conclude from these facts that the Australian World Heritage nomination process is at close to a stand still. There are a number of explanations for this situation but they have nothing to do with the actual quality of heritage values of the areas on the ACF waiting list.

In fact in the case of Antarctica the complete absence of any World Heritage site on the fifth largest continent with its exceptional Outstanding Universal Value is an embarrassing gap in the global World Heritage system and with a claim to 42% of the continent Australia has the clear potential to be a leader in filling it.

The size of some of ACF's proposals is another possible inhibiting factor in the case of Cape York Peninsula, the Kimberley and the Western and Eastern Arid Zone candidates but this did not prove to be an overwhelming obstacle for the Great Barrier Reef nomination. In Tasmania the main factors holding up a major extension, including the proposed Tarkine addition, appear to be forestry and mining interests. In the case of the Eastern Arid Zone, the Western Arid Zone, the Nullarbor and the Alps and South East Forests the fact that these proposals are located in two or more States and Territories, has proved to be an obstacle. The provisions made for on-going evaluation of World Heritage values in the Regional Forest Agreements of the late 1990s have had little positive impact.

It is worth noting that according to the then Environment Minister John Faulkner (letter to author of 6th June, 1995) it was a lack of cooperation by some of the States that led to the abandonment of Australia's Indicative List in 1995 before it had been submitted to the Committee. Under the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment of 1992 the Commonwealth now consults the States and Territories before proceeding with a nomination.

Finally, the whole process has been slowed by the fact that under the Heritage Protocol of April 2004 adopted by all the States, Territories and the Commonwealth it was agreed that "as a general principle" future



The world's great wilderness of Antarctica is undoubtedly of outstanding universal value – will it get this ultimate recognition? Photo © David Neilson

Australian World Heritage nominations are drawn from the National Heritage List. Unfortunately under resourcing of the responsible federal department means that heritage assessments of such nominations can take up to ten years. The values are there but they have to be verified. In the meantime their absence from both our National list and a World Heritage Tentative List exposes them to devastating developments such as those currently threatening the Kimberley, Cape York Peninsula and the Tarkine.

The way forward

The main remedy is for the Commonwealth, the States and Territories to give World Heritage nomination a much higher priority. The Commonwealth as the leader needs to put more work into providing resources and achieving cooperation and there needs to be a parallel improvement in the work of the EPHC. All of the sites I have mentioned in the Tables deserve to be placed on Australia's Tentative World Heritage List within the next few years. This would give Australia a credible Tentative List by increasing it from two to 13, the same number as the current lists of the UK and the USA. These are the defining landscapes of our nation and we have pledged to pass them on to future generations with their qualities intact.

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Author

Dr. Geoff Mosley AM

Convener/Chair ACF Natural Environment and Caring for Country Strategic Policy Committee, Australian Conservation Foundation, Floor 1, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, Victoria

Biography

Dr. Geoff Mosley AM has been involved with assessing and preparing World Heritage nominations since 1974 in his capacity as the ACF CEO (1973-1986), ACF Councillor (1987), IUCN Regional Councillor (1981-1988), Member of IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (1979 -) and heritage consultant (1986-).

Appendix A. The Waiting List

- The Lineage of Areas Proposed For World Heritage Nomination for Several Decades

Property	Proposal History
Cape York Peninsula	Proposed by ACF in March 1977; IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991; recommended by EPHC for consideration for Australia's Tentative List in June, 2007.
Eastern Arid Zone (Including Channel Country, Simpson Desert and Lake Eyre)	Proposed by ACF March, 1977 as 'The Channel Country – Lake Eyre (encompassing Simpson Desert)'; IUCN Indicative Inventory, 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991.
The South West Of Western Australia	Proposed by ACF in March, 1977 as 'The West Australian Wildflower Region' (in 1981 name changed to 'Forest and Wildflower Regions of WA'); IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991.
Antarctica	Proposed by ACF March, 1977; Australian Antarctic Territory included on IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991.
Alps And Eucalypt Forests Of South East Australia: Australian Alps and East Gippsland National Parks	Proposed by ACF in 1987, proposal extended to include National Parks in South Eastern New South Wales in December 1999; Australian Indicative List 1992; name changed to 'Alps and Eucalypt Forests of South East Australia' in 1996; Alps recommended by EPHC for consideration for Australia's Tentative List in June, 2007.
Nullarbor	Proposed by ACF in 1989; Australian Indicative List 1991.

Table 1. Properties that have been proposed by various bodies as identified, but are not World Heritage listed and not on Australia's Tentative World Heritage List as at July, 2012.

Property	Proposal History
The Kimberley	Proposed by ACF in 1977, initially as 'Prince Regent River and Kimberley Region', name changed in 1981 to 'The Kimberleys'; IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991; Purnululu National Park inscribed 2003; ACF boundary extension review (to include Dampier Peninsula) commenced 2011.
Western Arid Zone	Proposed by ACF as 'Ayers Rock and Arid Zone' in 1977; Uluru National Park on IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991; West Macdonnell National Park recommended by EPHC for inclusion on Australia's Tentative List in May, 2009; Uluru/Kata Tjuta inscribed 1987 and 1994 (additional values).
Arnhem Land	Proposed by ACF in August 1974 as 'Western Arnhem Land'; in 1977 proposal extended to 'Arnhem Land' (in 1981 defined as including Cobourg Peninsula, Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve and Murganella Wildlife Sanctuary); Kakadu National Park on IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991; Kakadu National Park inscribed 1981, extended 1987 and 1992.
Tasmanian Wilderness	'South West Tasmania' proposed by ACF in August, 1974, 'The Central Highlands - Tasmania' separately proposed in March, 1977, Tarkine separately proposed in 1989 and in 2010 included as part of 800,000 hectare proposed extension to Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area; South West Tasmania on IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991; Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area inscribed in 1982 (including areas in South West Tasmania, Central Highlands and Central Plateau), extended 1989.
The Great Barrier Reef	Proposed by ACF in 1974; IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991; all except northern section inscribed in 1981.

Table 2. Part listed but with proposed extensions - not on Australia's Tentative List as at July, 2012.

Property	Proposal History
Gondwana Rainforests of Australia	Proposed by ACF in 1984; Australian Indicative List 1991; inscribed in 1986 as 'Australian East Coast and Temperate and Subtropical Rainforest Parks', extended 1994 and renamed 'Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia', in 2007 further renamed as 'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia'; recommended by EPHC for extension in May, 2009; added to Australia's Tentative List for extension in May, 2010.; 2012 proposal to add eucalypt forests to extension.
Great Sandy Region	Fraser Island proposed by ACF in May, 1974 and proposal extended to 'Great Sandy Region' (including Cooloola) in March 1977; IUCN Indicative Inventory 1982; Australian Indicative List 1991; Fraser Island inscribed 1992 (21% of the original nomination); Cooloola extension recommended by EPHC for consideration for Australia's Tentative List in May, 2009; added to Australia's Tentative List for extension in January, 2010.

Table 3. Part listed - extension proposed and on Australia's Tentative List at July 2012

Appendix B. International Procedures and the Role of Tentative Lists

- Article 11.1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention requires each State Party "in so far as is possible, to submit to the World Heritage Committee an inventory of property forming the cultural and natural; heritage situated in its territory and suitable for inclusion in the list provided for in paragraph 2 of this article".
- The submission of "tentative lists" was first recommended by the World Heritage Committee in 1980. Submission of "Tentative Lists", "preferably" at least one year before any World Heritage nomination is considered, became mandatory for future cultural property nominations in 1988 and for natural property nominations in 2000 (Paragraphs 63 and 65 of the Operational Guidelines). State Parties are "encouraged to re-examine and re-submit their Tentative List" at least every ten years" Paragraph 65 of (Operational Guidelines). In 2011 "preferably" was removed and after 31st January, 2013 sites must have been on a the Tentative List of a State Party for at least a year before a World Heritage nomination can be submitted.
- A limit on the overall number of World Heritage List nominations to be examined annually by the World Heritage Committee was instituted in 2000 on an experimental basis. Initially this was 30 but in 2004 it was increased to 45. In 2007 a new priority system was set to apply where the overall annual limit of 45 nominations was exceeded.
- An annual limit on the number of nominations from State Parties was also introduced at this time. Initially, the limit for State Parties with sites already listed was 1 nomination per year but in 2004 this was increased to 2 per year provided one of them concerned a natural property (the aim being to try and correct the imbalance between cultural and natural properties). In 2007 the requirement for one nomination to be of a natural property was discontinued for 4 years (from 2008) with the State Party permitted to decide "as per its national priorities, its history and geography". The current version applying from 2011 is that one of the two nominations should concern "a natural property or a cultural landscape" (Paragraph 61 a) Operational Guidelines). The impact of this is to be reviewed by the World Heritage Committee in 2015.