

Australia

State of the Environment

2016

Notes from the Australian Committee for IUCN Workshop

4 March 2016



State of the Environment 2016—Heritage Theme Supplementary Material

Citation

DoEE (Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy) (2017b). Notes from the Australian Committee for IUCN Workshop, 4 March 2016, Sydney.

Publication information

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Cover image

Bradley Wilken (Teacher Alfred Deakin High School) holding Stimson's Python (*Antaresia stimsoni*) on a Bush Blitz near Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

Photo by Dr Dane Trembath

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Mackay Strategic Pty Ltd, Sydney

Preamble

Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, the Minister for Environment is required to table a report in Parliament every five years on the state of the Australian environment. The State of the Environment report 2016 (SoE 2016) will build on data and information published in SoE 2011.

The SoE report assesses the current state of the Australian environment across a range of disciplinary 'themes' (including heritage), explores how the environment changes over time and reports on emerging and future environmental matters. It is a source of independent and credible information and data, at national and regional scales, and is compiled by independent subject matter experts.

SoE has a broad stakeholder base and is used by the Department, all levels of government, regional bodies, NGOs, the general community, Indigenous people and organisations, researchers and educators. The publication supports policy development, guides decision-making, improves understanding of environmental issues and their context, underpins research prioritisation and supports environmental advocacy.

The Heritage Chapter of SoE 2011 has proven useful and informative for heritage management at both Commonwealth and State levels and has particularly informed the preparation of the Australian Heritage Strategy.

Representatives from the Australian Committee for IUCN (ACIUCN) met with a representative of the Department of the Environment and the heritage theme author for the State of the Environment 2016 report (SoE 2016) in February 2016. The objectives of this meeting were to:

- draw upon the knowledge of the ACIUCN in relation to the state, pressures and management effectiveness for natural heritage across Australia;
- identify key issues and relevant data sources; and
- contribute to the identification and preparation of suitable case studies.

The main SoE 2016 report will be a succinct volume, drawn from a series of supporting essays – including one on heritage. These essays will contain assessment summaries which parallel those in SoE 2011. A major challenge in completing assessment summaries for heritage is a lack of empirical data. Reliance is therefore placed on opinions expressed through facilitated workshops with relevant bodies, such as the ACIUCN.

At the workshop on 3 March 2016 the ACIUCN representatives were invited to express opinions about the 'the 'state', 'pressures' and 'management effectiveness' for different components of Australia's heritage,

and to identify significant issues, relevant case studies, useful data sources or other matters relevant to the SoE 2016 heritage theme report.

This document provides a 'meeting record' of key opinions and advice, which will contribute to the heritage theme report for SoE 2016; it does not provide a comprehensive chronicle of all that transpired during the workshop discussions. In the following commentary, select reference is made to the 'assessment summaries' provided in the heritage chapter of SoE 2011. Because SoE 2016 is a review and update of SoE 2011, a key question is whether any of these assessments have changed and if so, why? The meeting notes below therefore only indicate where changes to assessment summaries or related commentaries have been suggested.

This meeting record will be published online as part of the suite of SoE 2016 documents.

Participants: Mr Peter Cochrane, Prof Marc Hockings, Ms Penny Figgis AO, Mr Richard Leck (via telephone), Mr Graham Tupper and Ms Kathy Zischka, with Mr Jim Longworth (SoE 2016 Team, Australian Government Department of the Environment), Prof Richard Mackay (SoE 2016 heritage theme author)

Richard Mackay acknowledged Country, welcomed all present and provided a brief overview of SoE 2016; the approach, timeline, report structure, engagement processes and intention to provide more extensive and integrated coverage of Indigenous issues.

State and Trends of Australia's Heritage

Process of Listing

There is currently no budget for additional acquisitions for the National Reserve System.

The NRS is over-dependent on Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), which exceed 65,000,000 ha, but these have varying levels of protection.

There has been a big shift in the last 10 years, not only dedication of IPAs, but also private reserves such as former pastoral leases. However, there are still issues: e.g. WA and QLD have not altered legislation to allow conservation on pastoral leases. There is increasing pressure on governments to allow greater "multiple uses" for land but a lack of understanding about the difference between listed or reserved lands and achieving conservation objectives. Private land conservation is at risk of resource extraction, it is not a secure tenure for conservation.

Other areas of Aichi Target 11 (17% terrestrial protection) are not addressed, owing to the focus on overall percentages. Other considerations such as landscape scale, connectivity, area size, funding levels and sustainability are relevant. Now that the notional target percentage is reached, there is less 'pressure' to add under-represented ecosystems.

Is it possible to introduce some notion of priority areas or priority sites for the NRS?

It might be worth presenting the bioregions as a sliding histogram/graph.

The the 2011 assessment grades for natural heritage, should be altered to be good and stable (previously good and improving), and the commentary should be reviewed.

Physical Condition and Integrity

The condition and integrity of natural heritage has been significantly affected by climate change impacts. Invasive species such as myrtle rust, phytophthora and other pathogens have increased.

The reservation of so much land as IPAs has affected the integrity of the total NRS.

There has been a nett decline in resources, especially when considered in relation to the extent of reserved lands and listed natural places.

Unlisted significant heritage places are declining in condition through lack of recognition and therefore management resources.

The 2011 assessment grades for natural heritage should be revised to be poor and deteriorating, (previously good and unclear) in view of the impact of climate change, invasive species and relative reduction in available resources.

Pressures Affecting Australia's Heritage

Climate Change

The 2011 assessment grades for climate change do not require amendment, but the general downward trend continues.

An example should be added regarding the impact of all the fire regimes; for example the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area fires. (Consult with Prof Jamie Kirkpatrick, University of Tasmania).

There is a focus on the terrestrial environment at the expense of marine. Consideration should be given to adding "ocean acidification" as a climate change driver. Rising CO² levels are causing ocean acidification, and rising ocean temperature affects species viability and species range. (Consult with Dr Katharina Fabricius AIMS and /or Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg at the University of Queensland).

Consider whether pollution/debris is also a 'pressure' on natural heritage, especially marine pollution.

Population Growth

It would be helpful to understand whether there is a trend on community perceptions about the value of heritage, but are data available?

Population shift and the effect of urbanisation cause disconnection between people and the natural environment. This, in turn, correlates with reduced perceptions about the importance and allocation of resources. However, international (tourism) perspectives and imagery are dominated by natural heritage icons.

Economic Growth – Resource Extraction

A significant development in relation to resource extraction is the suggestion that it is possible to extract resources while still conserving significant natural heritage areas.

The 2011 assessment grades for Economic Growth – Resource extraction do not need to alter, but text should be included to reflect new industries such as coal seam gas and shale (unconventional) gas, as well as increasing recognition of mining legacy issues and inadequacies in lease relinquishment processes e.g. the Ranger uranium mine, the McArthur River mine.

Economic Growth – Tourism

There would be benefits in future arising from unravelling of community perceptions between domestic and international tourists, and their perceptions of the value of nature-based tourism and attractions. Nature based tourism has potential to increase pressure, but also increases public awareness of nature.

The 2011 assessment grades for Economic Growth – Tourism should be amended to be high impact and stable, (previously low impact and stable).

Natural Heritage – Invasive Species

Invasive species continue to present major challenges to natural heritage. However, there have been some 'good news' stories such as the management of Bilbys at Astrebla Downs (Qld), which would be a potential case study. The 2011 assessment grades should remain unchanged.

Natural Heritage – Land Use

There has been significant growth in pressures, particularly for land clearing in Queensland.

The 2011 assessment summary should be adjusted to be low impact but deteriorating, (previously low impact and stable).

Effectiveness of Heritage Management

A range of relevant issues and observations were noted:

- Leadership should be afforded more prominence.
- There should be better links between public and private reserves (both conceptually and physically). Commentary could be included which addresses how the implications of the SoE report can be translated into public policy change; some of the perceived community value is lost in translation and is not reflected in resourcing allocations.
- Governments at all levels are retreating from the environment, from both policy and resourcing perspectives.
- Benchmarks are not clear – is the desired state reflected in the number of listed places or area of reserved lands, or alternatively in their health and integrity; or in relation to benefits for the community? This is a potentially important question, in terms of future evaluations and judgements about adequacy.
- Where possible, it would be helpful for the assessments presented to make reference to the specific evidence. This is particularly relevant in relation to management effectiveness, where understanding of context should be connected to processes, outputs and outcomes. (It was recognised that this may not be feasible for SoE 2016, (as it is an update to SoE 2011), but it may be a desirable long-term goal.
- Additional information should be included on the marine environment and freshwater systems.
- It would be helpful (though challenging) to address the potential economic value of heritage; this transcends more traditional consideration of the value of ecosystem services.

Conclusion

The outlook commentary should present a simple narrative: natural and cultural heritage is valuable; it therefore needs to be understood and should be managed to conserve identified heritage values.