

# Australia

State of the Environment

2016

**Parks Agencies**

**Natural Heritage Survey**



## State of the Environment 2016—Heritage Theme Supplementary Material

### Citation

DoEE (Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy) (2017d). Parks Agencies—natural heritage survey, for State of the environment 2016: heritage, DoEE, Canberra.

### Publication information

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Cover image

Fauna surveying in Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park, Northern Territory

Photo by Parks Australia

## Parks Agencies

### Natural Heritage Survey

Parks agencies' representatives were invited to contribute to the 'heritage' theme of the State of the Environment 2016 report (SoE 2016).

The aggregated responses to the survey are presented here. The text below is the introductory text provided to the respondents. Three agencies' responses were completed (Queensland, South Australia and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority), all from members whose work involves both cultural and natural heritage. The most frequent response to each question is shaded for visual interpretation.

#### Overview

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

The EPBC Act specifically includes the 'heritage values of places' as part of the 'environment'. Heritage values are defined as including: the place's natural and cultural environment having aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance, or other significance, for current and future generations of Australians. In SoE 2016 natural heritage places include areas whose values can be identified and which have been (or should be) formally identified and managed for conservation purposes. Such places might include national parks, reserves, botanic gardens and private conservancies, as well as significant fauna and flora habitats or geological sites.

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 experts.

The Australian 'Heads of Parks' are invited to contribute to SoE 2016. This contribution would include completion of this survey about natural heritage issues, plus a separate Excel spreadsheet with agency specific data. It is also hoped that a short focused workshop discussion can be included on the agenda of the first Heads of Parks meeting in 2016.

This survey is confined to 'natural heritage'. Separate consultation with State heritage officials, the Department of the Environment Indigenous Advisory Committee and Australia ICOMOS is addressing cultural heritage. However, the accompanying spreadsheet does seek some basic data on cultural heritage places within the parks estate, as this may be noted in the heritage theme report for SoE 2016.

The approach to preparing SoE 2016 will be similar to SoE 2011, but available resources are greatly reduced. The main SoE 2016 report will be a succinct volume, drawn from a series of nine supporting papers – including biodiversity and heritage. These essays will contain assessment summaries which parallel those in SoE 2011.

A major challenge in completing assessment summaries for the heritage theme report is the lack of empirical data. Reliance is therefore placed on expert opinions expressed by groups with relevant opinions, such as the Heads of Parks.

The questions below are generally framed and focused at a ‘national’ level. It is recognised that this does not facilitate consideration of the fine grain and major differences between jurisdictions and places. Nevertheless, if you are able to accept the highly general nature of the approach and provide a response, the 5 to 10 minutes of your time will contribute directly to some of the heritage theme findings of the 2016 State of the Environment Report.

The data that you provide in this survey will be provided to the Department of the Environment on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia. This data may be used under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution licence to support the work being done for the State of the Environment Report 2016.

<b>State and Trends of Australia’s Natural Heritage</b>					
How strongly do you agree with the following statements about the state and trend of natural heritage in the last five years?					
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Significant progress has been made in the collection of data relating to statutory listing processes for natural heritage.			3		
The number of listed natural heritage places has increased and there have been more systematic, thematic natural heritage assessment projects.		1	2		
The majority of Australia’s natural heritage places are in good condition and retain integrity of their identified values.		2	1		
<b>Comments:</b>					
"Australia's natural heritage is under increasing pressure from a range of impacts some direct, some by default. Climate change and a drying environment is placing significant stress on the natural environment and gives rise to an increased negative impact in a number of both introduced species as well as native species. An increase of severe weather events including fire, is having a negative impact on our natural heritage.					
Increasingly Australia's natural heritage is being required to justify the level of resourcing committed to it in the context of economic contribution or social wellbeing.					
Many jurisdictions are struggling to maintain current levels of resource allocation or have significantly reduced resource allocation to natural heritage. "					
“Significant progress has been made in the collection of data relating to management of natural heritage places, particularly those owned and/or managed by the Commonwealth. It is however difficult to ascertain a national perspective on progress of data relating to statutory listing processes.					

Whilst several places have been added to the National Heritage List (NHL) from 2011 onwards, it appears only a few places (2+) have been included on the NHL for their natural heritage values. Although it may be the case that some heritage places listed on the NHL (since 2011) may satisfy multiple National Heritage criteria (i.e. some Indigenous places may have also met national heritage criteria relevant to the category of natural). A further line of evidence to answer these questions more fully is an analysis of the call for nominations by the Australian Heritage Council to the National Heritage List (closed February 2016). Further analysis of the Australian Heritage Councils agreed Finalised Priority Assessment List will also provide additional information to answer these questions

### Pressures on Australia's Natural Heritage

How do you perceive the level of impact of the following pressures on Australia's natural heritage?

Pressure	Very High Impact	High Impact	Low Impact	Very Low Impact	No Impact
<b>Climate Change</b>					
Rising temperatures	3				
Changing rainfall	2	1			
Rising sea level	1	2			
Altered fire regimes		3			
Extreme weather events	1	2			
<b>Population</b>					
Population growth		2		1	
Population shift			3		
Community perceptions of value	1	2			
<b>Economic Growth</b>					
Resource extraction		2	1		
Development		2	1		
Tourism		1	2		
<b>Impact of above pressures on these aspects</b>					
Biodiversity	2	1			
Habitat / connectivity	2	1			

### Other Pressures or Comments:

- Coordination of environmental protection laws and statutory processes between Commonwealth and State jurisdictions.
- Adequate capacity for thorough and comprehensive identification of values for appropriate and well-informed decision making about management goals (and strategies), resource allocation and impact assessment.
- Adequate involvement of Traditional Owners in decision making around the identification, management and resource allocations for Australia's natural heritage.
- Need to consider cumulative effect of multiple pressures on condition of values and resilience.

## Management Effectiveness for Australia's Natural Heritage

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Identification</b>					
Australia's natural heritage is well understood and appropriately recognised.		1	1		1
Adequate resources are available for the survey, identification and assessment of Australia's natural heritage places.				2	1
<b>Management</b>					
Management needs and processes are well understood by those responsible for managing Australia's natural heritage places.	1	1		1	
Appropriate management plans or other mechanisms are in place for the management of Australia's heritage places.	1		2		
<b>Protection</b>					
Australia's natural heritage receives adequate protection through existing statutory controls.		1	2		
Decisions regarding natural heritage places are well-informed by an understanding of heritage values and relevant national and international principles and guidelines.		1	1	1	
<b>Leadership</b>					
There are appropriate governance structures in place to co-ordinate and manage natural heritage in Australia.		1	1		1
<b>Celebration</b>					
Natural heritage places in Australia are accessible, well-presented and contribute to the community's sense of place.	2		1		

### Is there other Information you would like to provide:

"Like much of Australia's natural heritage, the Great Barrier Reef is vulnerable to a range of pressures, particularly to the effects of climate change. It is critical that Management Agencies are adequately resourced to build on strong and innovative adaptive management approaches to address the pressures facing heritage and improve its resilience to a range of challenges.

Australia's heritage cannot solely be a description of the resources themselves, but must include an assessment of what values have been identified and their current condition. A key area of focus required to conserve Australia's natural heritage for future generations must be to increase management capacity around adequate (thorough and comprehensive) identification and mapping of place-based heritage values; and ongoing monitoring and assessment of short term, medium term and long term condition – with ability to regularly collect valid and reliable data in order to provide

management agencies with adequate information about trend and integrity.

Australia's heritage is a shared responsibility, not solely a government function. To reduce pressures, minimise risk and retain those heritage values that make our heritage places special a whole-of-landscape approach is required. This requires a strong partnership approach and/or associated governance measures between government/management agencies and the broader community, business and industry sectors – refer Reef2050 Plan Governance arrangements.”

#### Useful information sources:

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Report, GBRMPA, Townsville
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, Great Barrier Reef Region Strategic Assessment Program Report, GBRMPA, Townsville
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2014, Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report, GBRMPA, Townsville
- The Commonwealth of Australia (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority) 2014 Great Barrier Reef: pressures, resilience and strong management responses, GBRMPA, Townsville
- Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan, Commonwealth of Australia 2015
- Refer list Drivers, Actions, Pressures from the GBR Outlook Report 2014.  
<http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/managing-the-reef/great-barrier-reef-outlook-report>
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan 2003
- Cairns Area Plan of Management 2008
- Whitsundays Plan of Management 1998, 1999, 2002, 2005 and 2008 with 2015 review.
- Hinchinbrook Plan of Management 2004
- Shoalwater Bay (Dugong) Plan of Management 1996
- Site specific Management Arrangements - Far Northern Management Area/ Cairns/Cooktown Management Area/ Townsville/Whitsunday Management Area/Mackay/Capricorn Management Area Site infrastructure Management
- The North-East Shipping Management Plan 2014 – AMSA

#### Other comments:

"One example that demonstrates cross tenure/jurisdiction identification of values coupled with management that is focused on the resource and its values is the joint Commonwealth/Qld Strategic Assessment process for the Great Barrier Reef (2014). This also demonstrates government's commitment to adaptive management as an important technique for effective heritage conservation.

One example that demonstrates the need for linking landscape conservation across multiple tenures and jurisdictions being recognised and actioned - refer Reef 2050 Plan (Long Term Sustainability Plan); including Reef2050 Plan Governance arrangements for the Great Barrier Reef.

The GBRMPA's reports (2014) and the Reef 2050 Plan outline a continuous cycle of improvement based on setting goals and priorities, developing strategies, taking action and measuring results, which then feed back into management. The Reef 2050 Plan also incorporates a formal monitoring and evaluation framework.”