




Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities



A World Heritage Nomination for Cape York Peninsula



Cape York is of course the home to Shelburne Bay...
an extraordinary landscape where it's hard to believe
that you are in fact on Earth, when you're standing
among those pure white sand dunes.

Tony Burke, Environment Minister



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CAPE YORK PENINSULA— ONE OF THE WORLD'S SPECIAL PLACES

A world heritage nomination with Traditional Owner consent and community support

The Australian Government is committed to a world heritage nomination for appropriate areas of Cape York Peninsula, subject to Traditional Owner consent.

Community consultation is taking place on preparing a nomination document for submission to the World Heritage Centre. A successful world heritage nomination requires a thorough assessment of the natural and cultural values of Cape York Peninsula.

The Australian Government's commitment to Traditional Owner consent respects the rights of Indigenous people and the nomination will only proceed for those areas where Traditional Owners have given their consent.

The Australian Government will continue to work with Traditional Owners, the Queensland Government, the peninsula community, pastoralists and other landholders to share information and provide opportunities for open and meaningful discussion on the rich cultural and natural heritage values of Cape York Peninsula and how they can best be managed.



WHAT IS THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST?

The World Heritage List recognises places representing the best examples of the world's cultural and natural heritage—places that are important for all nations, people and cultures—that are universal.

The World Heritage List is established under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The World Heritage Committee, which administers the World Heritage List, is made up of representatives from 21 of the signatory countries to the Convention, elected by their General Assembly.

Australia is one of 188 countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention. As a signatory, the Australian Government has a responsibility to identify, protect, conserve, and present the cultural and natural heritage in our country that is considered to be of outstanding value to all peoples of the world. The Australian Government is also responsible for nominating places to be considered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee for inscription on the World Heritage List.

Australia has 19 places on the World Heritage List, including: the Wet Tropics of Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef, the Sydney Opera House, Purnululu National Park, Lord Howe Island, the Greater Blue Mountains and Kakadu National Park.

World heritage listing brings international recognition and provides protection for the listed cultural and natural heritage values of a place under Australia's national environmental law—the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

World heritage listing does not prevent communities from continuing their economic development and the tenure of listed areas does not change. Only activities that are likely to have a significant impact on the listed world heritage values (or other matters of national environmental significance) require referral and approval under the EPBC Act.





WHAT MAKES CAPE YORK PENINSULA A PLACE OF WORLD HERITAGE VALUE?

Cape York Peninsula has long been recognised as one of Australia's most important heritage places—a place with a rich and diverse Indigenous story, where culture remains strong and communities have cared for their country since time immemorial. It is a vast area with spectacular landscapes of exceptional beauty and a mosaic of ecosystems supporting extraordinary biological biodiversity. Savanna woodlands, rainforest and spectacular sandstone escarpments adjoin vast river catchments and wetlands. The integrity of the peninsula's interconnecting ecosystems and their evolutionary links with New Guinea make it one of a kind. Many of its plants and animals are found nowhere else in the world.

Cape York Peninsula is an exceptional example of a large, complex and diverse cultural landscape whose functioning ecosystems have been shaped by a continuum of Aboriginal land management that combines both physical and spiritual maintenance of resources over many thousands of years. Subject to Traditional Owner consent, world heritage listing would recognise the rich and diverse cultural traditions and land management practices of the Indigenous people of Cape York

Peninsula and complement the other world heritage cultural properties in Australia such as Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Kakadu.

Cape York Peninsula supports some of the last remaining large areas of savanna in good condition anywhere in the world. The peninsula also includes a large number of high integrity perennial river catchments and wetland complexes, which represent important seasonal refuges for many northern Australian animal species and international migratory birds.



Even though the region accounts for only three per cent of the Australian landmass, it contains 18.5 per cent of Australian plant species, including more than 3,300 vascular plant species and 1,100 rainforest species. It is also significant for the diversity of its reptiles, frogs, butterflies, orchids, sedges, grasses and mangrove species—many of which are found only on the peninsula.

The region's outstanding geological features include the active dune fields of Shelburne Bay and Cape Flattery, the remarkable granite boulder fields of Cape Melville and hundreds of kilometres of undisturbed coastline adjoining the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The world heritage nomination

The world heritage nomination document is prepared in consultation with key interest groups and the community and submitted by the Australian Government. The nomination must provide comprehensive evidence, through national and international comparisons, of how the nominated areas demonstrate outstanding universal value.

What is outstanding universal value?

Outstanding universal value is the central idea of the World Heritage Convention. Broadly, its meaning follows the common sense interpretation of the words:

Outstanding = For properties to be of outstanding universal value they should be exceptional, or superlative—they should be among the most remarkable places on Earth.

Universal = Properties need to be outstanding from a global perspective. World heritage does not aim to recognise areas that are remarkable from solely a national or regional perspective—countries are encouraged to develop other approaches to recognise these places.

Value = What makes a property outstanding and universal is its “value”, or the natural and/or cultural worth of a property. This value is based on standards and processes established under the World Heritage Convention's Operational Guidelines (see whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines).

To be considered of outstanding universal value, a property needs to meet one or more of 10 world heritage criteria. It also needs to meet the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity (for cultural properties), and have an adequate system of protection and management.

Indicative/potential world heritage values of Cape York Peninsula

Cultural values

Cultural values can only be decided through a thorough consultation and planning approach with the Peninsula's Traditional Owners

Subject to this consultation with Traditional Owners, areas of Cape York Peninsula may have outstanding universal value under the following cultural world heritage criteria:

(iii) a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a living cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared

(v) an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change, and

(vi) directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

Natural values

Areas of Cape York Peninsula may have outstanding universal value under the following natural world heritage criteria:

(vii) Superlative natural phenomena/areas of exceptional natural beauty:

- Vast area of high integrity diverse ecosystems
- Spectacular coastal dune fields
- Steep eastern escarpments and monsoon rainforests: McIlwraith and Iron Ranges
- Superb natural river catchments
- Hundreds of kilometres of undisturbed coastal scenery
- Flood and marine plains.

(viii) Outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history and geological processes:

- Cape York Peninsula's geomorphological features show that entire landscapes can persist for millions of years
- Shelburne Bay, Cape Bedford and Cape Flattery tropical dune fields
- Intact beach barrier "chenier" dune formations stretching for hundreds of kilometres.





(ix) Outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes:

- an extensive, high integrity mosaic of diverse ecosystems, which includes globally rare tropical savanna
- biological connectivity between Australia and New Guinea that continues to evolve
- a flora that is representative of the global development of sclerophyll (hard-leaved) plants during the Tertiary period; including rare tropical heaths
- west flowing river systems that support extensive coastal wetlands through the dry season.

(x) Outstanding examples representing the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity:

- continuous and diverse native vegetation featuring high integrity tropical monsoon savanna, rainforests, grasslands, heathlands and extensive wetland systems.
- high species richness for key plant and animal groups; many of which are only known from the Cape York Peninsula, including:
 - for plants: orchids, grasses, sedges and mangroves
 - for animals: reptiles, amphibians, freshwater fish and butterflies.

Defining boundaries

The boundaries of a potential Cape York world heritage nomination will depend on where the natural and cultural heritage values of outstanding universal value are identified and where Traditional Owner consent has been given.

The Australian Government will work with Traditional Owners, the Queensland Government and the Cape York community to help identify these values.





A PLACE ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

A place on the World Heritage List brings benefits to local communities and the nation as well as management responsibilities.

Benefits of world heritage listing

- international recognition of our country's rich heritage
- conservation, protection, presentation and transmission to future generations of our most important cultural and natural heritage
- benefits for sustainable tourism development and promotion opportunities with internationally recognised world heritage brand
- support for infrastructure and services, and
- opportunities for an expanded conservation economy—new jobs in managing natural and cultural heritage.



Managing world heritage listed properties

Under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the Australian Government is required to protect and conserve world heritage properties.

World heritage listing does not change land ownership and existing land managers continue to manage their land.

Management arrangements of world heritage properties in Australia vary. The primary management objectives for world heritage properties are to:

- protect, conserve and present the world heritage values of the property
- integrate the protection of the area into a comprehensive planning program
- give the property a function in the life of the Australian community
- strengthen appreciation and respect for the property's world heritage values, particularly through educational and information programs
- keep the community broadly informed about the condition of the world heritage values of the property, and
- take appropriate scientific, technical, legal, administrative and financial measures necessary for achieving these objectives.



Regard is also given to:

- the involvement of the local community in the planning and management of a property
- ensuring the provision of essential services to communities within and adjacent to a property
- allowing provision for use of the property which does not have a significant impact on the listed world heritage values and their integrity, and
- recognising the role of current managers in the protection of a property's values.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who decides what parts of Cape York Peninsula are included in the world heritage nomination?

Traditional Owners will decide those areas they wish to put forward for inclusion in the world heritage nomination. The Australian Government will submit a nomination to the World Heritage Committee for areas where potential world heritage values have been identified and Traditional Owners have given their consent.

The World Heritage Committee decides whether to include a place on the World Heritage List following rigorous assessment and advice from its advisory bodies—the International Conservation Union (IUCN) for natural values and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) for cultural values.

When will areas of Cape York Peninsula be nominated for world heritage?

The Australian Government will submit a nomination once the assessment of potential outstanding universal values is completed and Traditional Owners have given their consent.

Have boundaries already been decided?

No. Boundaries for a nomination will only be determined when the outstanding cultural and natural heritage values have been identified and Traditional Owners have given consent for areas to be included.

Will the whole of Cape York Peninsula be listed?

The Australian Government is not proposing a 'blanket listing' of Cape York Peninsula. Only areas where Traditional Owner consent is given will be included. Areas to be considered are being identified through a rigorous assessment of heritage values and consultation with communities. More work is required to identify these values and where they occur.

Will the residents of Cape York Peninsula be consulted?

Yes. Consultation has been underway since 2007 and is ongoing. A nomination to include areas of Cape York Peninsula on the World Heritage List will only go ahead with Traditional Owner consent. Community support is also important for a successful nomination.



How are Traditional Owners being involved?

Face to face meetings are being held with Traditional Owner groups to discuss world heritage and whether they are interested in their country being included in a nomination. Only areas where Traditional Owners have given consent will be included.

Will world heritage listing stop existing industries and activities?

Generally, no. World heritage values are protected under Australia's national environmental law—the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The EPBC Act allows for continuation of existing lawful use of land or sea if it commenced before the Act came into force on 16 July 2000 and has continued uninterrupted or regularly from before this date.

In addition, activities that have already been approved under the EPBC Act are not affected by world heritage listing.

New activities would need to be considered for their potential impact on world heritage values. If a new activity was likely to have a significant impact on the values, the proposal would need to be referred for formal consideration under the Act.

What about new industries and activities?

World heritage listing does not automatically prevent development. Only activities that are likely to have a significant impact on world heritage values (or other matters of national environmental significance) require approval under the EPBC Act.

Many economic activities continue in world heritage areas. For instance, recreational and commercial fishing continues in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and tourism at Kakadu National Park is a foundation for the local economy.

The World Heritage Committee generally considers that mining should not be allowed inside a world heritage property. The International Council on Mining and Metals has committed to not explore or mine in world heritage sites.

Can grazing continue in a world heritage area?

Yes, grazing continues in Australian world heritage areas such as Willandra Lakes in New South Wales and Shark Bay in Western Australia, and in other world heritage sites around the globe.

Does world heritage listing make the whole area a national park?

No. World heritage areas can cover all sorts of land tenures including pastoral leases, freehold, Aboriginal lands and unallocated state land.

Will world heritage listing affect the tenure of my land or access to my land?

World heritage listing does not change land tenure, access or ownership. World heritage areas do not become state or federal government land or the property of any international body or foreign power.



How are world heritage listed properties managed?

World heritage listing does not change land ownership and existing land managers still manage their land. Under the World Heritage Convention, the Australian Government is responsible for protecting the world heritage values of the properties and reporting periodically on their condition. Protection is based on the listed values and there is a shared responsibility between the Australian and state governments and local communities to ensure listed places are effectively managed. Management models for Australian world heritage properties vary to fit circumstances.

Will the community have a say in how a world heritage area on Cape York Peninsula will be managed?

Yes. The community will be involved in developing any new management arrangements for protecting any listed cultural and natural values of Cape York Peninsula.

Will the government provide funding to landowners whose properties are included in the world heritage listed area?

The Australian Government may provide technical and/or financial assistance for the identification, promotion, protection or conservation of places on the World Heritage List.

Can you fish and camp in world heritage areas?

World heritage listing does not affect existing rights and access to places to fish and camp.

Fishing and camping are popular activities in many of Australia's world heritage areas including Fraser Island, the Great Barrier Reef and Kakadu National Park.

Activities such as these may already be managed under state government legislation and through national park management plans.

Are native title rights affected by a world heritage nomination?

Native Title rights are not affected by a world heritage nomination or listing. An area will only be nominated for world heritage listing if Traditional Owners agree.

Where can I get further information?

For further information please:

- Visit the Australian Government's website www.environment.gov.au/heritage/about/world
- Contact the department's Community Information Unit on 1800 803 772 or
- Email your enquiry to capeyork@environment.gov.au



