Australia’s Tentative List: Existing and Potential Proposals

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1. What is a tentative list?

The Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention state that:

Article 7.

The World Heritage Committee requests each State party to submit to it a tentative list of properties which it intends to nominate for inscription during the following five years...[this will enable] the Committee to evaluate within the widest possible context the "outstanding universal value" of each property nominated to the list...[the WHC has decided] not to consider cultural nominations unless such a list of cultural properties has been submitted.

The convention goes on to note that:

Article 61 (c).

[When evaluating and examining nominations], ICOMOS is requested to make comparative evaluations of properties belonging to the same type of cultural property.

So, the development of such lists provides an essential context for World Heritage matters in Australia.

2. Development of tentative lists

The application of the Convention and the Operational Guidelines are constantly evolving through test cases; the development of a Global Strategy for world heritage and meetings of experts as well as the work of the World Heritage Committee itself.

In 1994 an expert meeting on the Global Strategy suggested that the imbalances in the World Heritage List might be redressed by considering in a broad anthropological context, through time, themes (which might be broken into sub-themes) such as:

Human co-existence with the land
  Movement of peoples (nomadism, migration)
  Settlement
  Modes of subsistence
  Technological evolution.

Human Beings in society
  Human interaction
  Cultural co-existence
  Spirituality and Creative expression
Relevant regional studies have included *Asian Rice Culture and its Terrace Landscapes* (Philippines), 1995 and *Associative Cultural Landscapes* (Australia), 1995.

In October 1995 the first Global Strategy meeting was held in Harare - our guest and keynote speaker today Dawson Munjeri was a participant.

In Harare, keynote speaker Leon Pressouyre noted the evolution of the operational guidelines, the fading of the notion of 'artistic masterpiece' and the emergence of a concept of culture closer to an anthropological approach, developing further the notion of conceptually reconciling the criteria applying to both natural and cultural heritage. He forcefully noted the discrepancies between the cultural priorities of Africa and the 1972 Convention, in particular the inadequacies of inscription procedures. He noted the expert workshops held in other parts of the world to develop tentative lists, but that this had not occurred in Africa, and that the tentative lists which were submitted by states on their own initiative were "generally established on the basis of short term political priorities..."

The outcomes of the meeting were conveyed to the World Heritage Commission in December, 1995, and further emphasis placed on the need to develop frameworks thematic or regional to make the list more representative (not necessarily balanced).

A Global Strategy meeting was held in Fiji in 1997, noting that the process of preparing tentative lists "must be carefully conducted with constant reference to the specific features, needs, cultural traditions and knowledge and the dominance of custom based land tenure of the region".

The second Pacific region Global Strategy meeting was held in Vanuatu in 1998, further recommending the urgent preparation of national comparative and Pacific-wide thematic reviews of potential World Heritage properties (including serial sites) especially in non-states parties to the Convention.

World Heritage Global Strategy Natural and Cultural Heritage Expert Meeting was held 25-29 March, 1998, in Amsterdam. Information presented to the WHC Bureau in Paris on 22 June, 1998, recommended that the World Heritage Convention should be seen as a holistic document and the lists as an on-going developing instrument that unites cultural and natural heritage.

Identification of outstanding universal value of heritage sites can only be made through systematic thematic studies, based on scientific research according to themes common to different regions or areas. Such a framework has already been established for biological aspects of natural heritage, and international and regional conventions and agreements such as Ramsar are also in place, but there is nothing similar for cultural places. The Amsterdam meeting suggested that tentative lists should refer to these themes. Serial nominations which refer to these themes should also be encouraged.
Australia offered to develop a preliminary draft, which will be presented to the WHC later this month in Cairns, and a timetable for its finalisation agreed. It is to be regretted that ICOMOS Australia was not part of the consultation process to develop this document.

The draft proposes the introduction of the concept of 'harmonisation' of tentative lists to ensure that States Parties do not unnecessarily duplicate types and themes of properties proposed for nomination. Harmonisation will be achieved through comparative analysis of the properties at a regional level and the integration of lists on a geo-cultural regional basis.

3. What's on Australia's tentative list currently?

Currently, three pending nominations

- The Blue Mountains
- The Convict Serial Sites
- The Sydney Opera House in its Harbour setting,

and also

- The Minister's election commitment to examine Panalulu and an extension to Riversleigh.

Until recently, concern that even tentative listing would immediately trigger Commonwealth legislation, prevented the extension of the list. It remains to be seen whether the Biodiversity Act amendments might lead to a wider schedule of potential sites.

4. Nominations in the wind

Other sites proposed for consideration:

- The Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
- The Victorian goldfields
- The plan of Canberra.