Celebrating 40 years of World Heritage – The Cairns Communiqué

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Prompted by a need identified by its members to sponsor a national dialogue about the future of World Heritage in Australia, the Australian Committee for IUCN (ACIUCN), with support from the Wet Tropics Management Authority and the Australian Conservation Foundation, convened a symposium in Cairns on the 9th and 10th of August 2012. Among the objectives of the symposium was to agree on a ‘Cairns Communiqué’ highlighting emerging priorities and key principles for Australian World Heritage in the future.

The symposium organising committee (which included the then President of Australia ICOMOS, Jane Harrington) prepared a draft of the Communiqué in advance of the symposium. Throughout the symposium, informed by the various presentations, participants provided comment and suggestions directly on the draft. It was further discussed in a plenary at the end of the presentations. The organising committee completed the Communiqué in the weeks following the symposium, ensuring it honoured the intentions of the symposium participants. It is published by ACIUCN in the symposium proceedings: Keeping the Outstanding Exceptional: the Future of World Heritage in Australia (Figgis et al 2012).

The introduction to the Communiqué summarises Australia’s achievements in listing 19 World Heritage properties. It outlines the diverse nature of the Outstanding Universal Value of the various listed properties that range from the sub-Antarctic Heard and McDonald Islands to the Wet Tropics of Queensland and the savannah landscapes of Kakadu. While most Australian properties are listed for natural or mixed values, the Communiqué notes the important cultural values of the Sydney Opera House, the Royal Exhibition Buildings and the Australian Convict Sites. It also notes that Indigenous culture is a prominent feature of the cultural heritage recognised in several Australian properties.

The 50 Articles of the Communiqué are organised around the duties of the State Parties to the World Heritage Convention – to identify, protect, conserve, present and transmit to future generations the natural and cultural heritage of its territory. Articles include reference to:

- Ensuring the highest standards of planning management and resources for World Heritage properties
- The need to systematically identify, assess and nominate places worthy of World Heritage listing, including restoration of a Tentative List for Australia
- The need for effective legislative protection of heritage at all levels of government
- The need to systematically identify and assess risks to heritage and for sufficient resource allocations to address these risks
- Greater consistency in branding and presentation of World Heritage and strong relationships with the tourism industry
- Ensuring recognition and respect for the rights and aspirations of Traditional Owners and ensuring appropriate systems of participation and engagement in management

- The importance of research in support of World Heritage properties

- The value and need for development of school education programs to ensure wide and continuing knowledge of Australia’s heritage

- Ensuring a property-specific framework for management of each property, with provision for community input and sufficient executive resources for implementation.

The Communique reflects the consensus views of more than 100 experts in World Heritage from around Australia. Its value and influence will depend largely on how effectively stakeholders utilise it in advancing the cause of Australia’s World Heritage.

The symposium proceedings, including the Communiqué, are available at: http://aciucn.org.au/index.php/publications-world-heritage/

References