

# Meeting Communiqué – September 2019

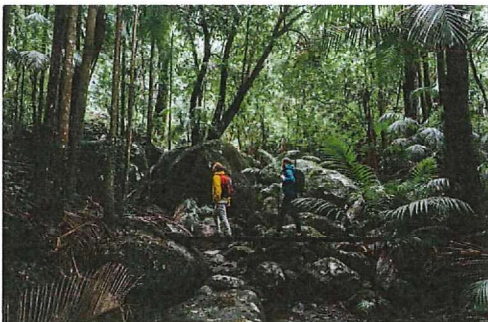
## *Advisory Committees for the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia*



The 32nd meetings of the Community Advisory Committee and the Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee were held at Binna Burra Lodge on Thursday 5 and Friday 6 September 2019. The following outcomes and recommendations are provided as advice to the ministers responsible for World Heritage management in each jurisdiction (New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Government).

### **Gondwana Rainforests 25th anniversary**

The Gondwana Rainforests 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary campaign successfully raised community awareness and appreciation of the Gondwana Rainforests. The advisory committees commend Amanda Cope of the NSW Visitor Experience team and NPWS staff on a fantastic job..



Brindle Creek walking track, Border Ranges NP.

Credit: DPIE Brandon Bodman

### **Gondwana Rainforests web-story**

The recent publication of the **Gondwana Rainforests web-story** on the Qld Parks and Wildlife webpage represents a significant step forward in promoting the Gondwana Rainforests narrative in an engaging and informative way. The Qld World Heritage Unit should be congratulated for this valuable communication and interpretation tool.

### **Key management recommendations**

#### **Strategic Management Plan**

It is our understanding that, consistent with the Australian World Heritage management principles, **World Heritage obligations should be the highest priority in the management of the property.** The Advisory Committees note that, although the reserves are well managed within the protected area system of NSW and Qld, there is limited resourcing for the management of the World Heritage property as an entity. **The ratification of the Strategic Management Plan for the property is a matter of critical urgency, as is the allocation of resources to enable immediate implementation of enhanced management, consistent with the World Heritage status of the property.**

### Valuation of the property

The Gondwana Rainforests is of incredible value to for community wellbeing and biodiversity conservation. We are aware of work underway to determine the value of national parks as destinations for recreation and tourism. **We recommend a valuation for the Gondwana Rainforests which includes biodiversity and ecosystem services** (including catchment protection, rainfall generation, human health and wellbeing). This will assist in providing clarity on the value of the property to the local, regional, national and international community, to support prioritisation of resource allocation.

### Enhanced coordination

**Coordination of cross-jurisdictional management is a critical issue.** Separate NSW and Qld processes makes it difficult to manage risk to the suite of values for which the property is listed. There are excellent examples of partnership projects and collaboration but there remain significant issues with inconsistent information and disparate datasets. Each state has its own legislation, bureaucracy and priorities, and the Commonwealth has been unable to participate in most Advisory Committee meetings during the current term, unlike previously. As this is a serial cross-jurisdictional property, the involvement of the Australian Government in coordination is critical. **Increased financial support for this coordination is required as the current investment is insufficient and poses a significant risk to the management of the property.**

### Enhanced transparency

Enhanced transparency **of governance arrangements, accountabilities and resourcing for the property** is needed to ensure advisory committees, as community representatives, can provide valuable and pertinent advice. This could be achieved through provision of Gondwana Rainforests annual operational plans and budgets to the Advisory Committees.

### Research and monitoring

The NSW and Qld governments have individual management, monitoring and reporting systems for the protected area estate, but there are no dedicated resources for the specific monitoring and reporting on the status and trend of the World Heritage values of the Gondwana Rainforests. This is critically important given the number of threats facing the property (published in the 2017 IUCN World Heritage Outlook report), and the need for improved management systems to address these threats, particularly given the loss of wildlife and decline in habitats due to the current fires. Additional resources are required to support the conservation of these remnant rainforests and the threatened species for which they provide homes.

It is **recommended there be annual and ongoing funding for a monitoring and research program** to assess and monitor the conservation status of the property. To achieve this there needs to be a **dedicated Gondwana Rainforests of Australia Secretariat or Hub** that creates and analyses this information, and ensures that the information is presented to the managing agencies, Advisory



Committees, and the broader community. It is recommended the hub be modelled, and resourced consistent with the management arrangements for the Wet Tropics, the Tasmanian Wilderness, or the Great Barrier Reef.



The Residence, Point Lookout NP.

Credit: DPIE John Spencer

### Climate change project

The advisory committees commend agency staff and their collaborators for the cutting-edge nature of the work being undertaken to develop a **Gondwana Rainforests climate adaptation** strategy. The preliminary work is encouraging and the advisory committees support the plan to undertake a detailed pilot project for the Tweed

Caldera group of reserves as an area with the highest concentration of threatened and endemic species. A lot more work is needed to identify adaptation options, including mapping spatially explicit refuges, and genetic variability in key species. Assessment of just one group of reserves within the World Heritage Area will assist in refining the methodology and information needs. It is critical that this work be expanded to prepare a strategy for the entire Gondwana Rainforests to support the conservation of the outstanding universal value of the property. It is also important that the multi-disciplinary approach being taken is continued with the ongoing involvement of the National Environmental Science Program (NESP or its equivalent going forward), the Bureau of Meteorology, CSIRO, the Qld Herbarium and NSW Science Division. The coordination of the project by the agencies between the two states illustrates the model that the Advisory Committees recommend for all key aspects of the management of the property.

### IN CLOSING

As this is the last advisory committee meeting in this term, we wish to express our appreciation to the Coordinating and Management Committees and managing agencies for their input and support to the operation of the Advisory Committees. We have appreciated the opportunity to support the protection and management of the property and continue to be available to provide further advice on any of the points raised above.

Sincerely,



Dr Mahri Koch  
Chair, Community Advisory Committee  
02 6734 4257  
[kochmahri@gmail.com](mailto:kochmahri@gmail.com)



Professor Nick C. H. Reid  
Chair, Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee  
0428 711 360  
[nrei3@une.edu.au](mailto:nrei3@une.edu.au)

## CONTEXT

The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area is a serial cross-jurisdictional property consisting of some 40 reserves across northeast New South Wales and southeast Queensland, including the iconic Lamington, Springbrook, Main Range, Mount Barney, Border Ranges, Wollumbin, Nightcap, Washpool, Gibraltar Range, Dorrigo, New England, Oxley Wild Rivers and Barrington Tops National Parks.

Inscribed on the World Heritage list for outstanding universal natural value, the property contains remnants of the rainforests that once covered the supercontinent of Gondwana. The area now contains endemic relict species found nowhere else in the world and closely related to those in the fossil record from millions of years ago. The dramatic landscapes tell the story of the development of the continent, including the Tweed Shield volcano, which is the best-developed erosion caldera in the world. The diversity of habitats and ancient species mixing with those newly evolved, makes this area one of Australia's biodiversity hot-spots containing some of the most important habitats for species of Outstanding Universal Value for conservation and science.

The Gondwana Rainforests Advisory Committees are appointed by the NSW and Qld environment ministers to provide advice to the ministers and managing agencies on the protection and management of the World Heritage property. The chairs of the Advisory Committees are jointly appointed by the NSW, Qld and Australian Government environment ministers. There are two Advisory Committees: a Community Advisory Committee appointed to provide advice on the protection and management of the property from the viewpoint of the community, and a Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee appointed to provide scientific advice for conservation management of the property, including advice on research and monitoring.