

Meeting communiqué – March 2018

Advisory Committees for the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area



Preamble

The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area is a serial cross-jurisdictional property comprised of some 40 reserves across northeast NSW 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 value, it contains remnants of the rainforests that once covered the supercontinent of Gondwana and 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 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 Queensland 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 committee are jointly appointed by the NSW, Queensland and Australian Government environment ministers. There are two advisory committees; a Community Advisory Committee appointed to provide advice and on the protection and management of the property from the viewpoint of the community, and a Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee appointed to provide advice on the scientific basis for conservation management of the property including advice on research and monitoring.

Communique

The Gondwana Rainforests Advisory Committees met in Brisbane on Thursday 22 March and Friday 23 March 2018. The Advisory Committees:

1. **Welcome** the news that Australia is again a member of the World Heritage Committee and strongly encourage ongoing Australian Government support, and enhanced resourcing, for the effective monitoring and conservation management of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia.
2. **Welcome** the news of an upcoming meeting between Queensland Environment and Science Minister Leanne Enoch, and the Chairs of all of Queensland's World Heritage Advisory Committees, including Gondwana Rainforests Chairs.
3. **Applaud** the work in progress to **promote and present** World Heritage and the Gondwana Rainforests in Queensland and seek a presentation about how NSW is addressing the presentation of the property (interpretation, branding and promotion).

4. **Recommend** representation of the Gondwana Rainforests at the upcoming Global Eco Asia-Pacific 2018 **Ecotourism conference** being held in Townsville on 26-28 November 2018, to raise the profile of the World Heritage area through a conference agenda item and/or presentation. The deadline for submissions is COB Friday, 29 June 2018. <https://globaleco.com.au/>
5. **Recommend** more funds and focus be provided to ensure effective protection and management of the Outstanding Universal Value of the Gondwana Rainforests. The Advisory Committees advise that the **data deficiencies** identified in the recent IUCN World Heritage Outlook assessment highlight the need for an integrated Research and Monitoring strategy. The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) has recently published an exemplar, and **additional resources and dedicated ongoing funding** (comparable to the TWWHA) are required to underpin an equivalent strategy for the Gondwana Rainforests to ensure the effective protection and conservation of the property.
6. **Applaud** the initiative to obtain a report on the **impacts of climate change** in the Queensland sections of the Gondwana Rainforests. The committees received a presentation by the eminent climate science communicator and author scientist Tim Low. Mr Low presented on his Queensland-focused research which emphasise the importance of context in developing an understanding of how species are likely to respond to changing climates. The committees look forward to seeing the final report, and recommend this initiative be extended to NSW.
7. **Welcome** the news of the **Biodiversity Sector Adaptation Plans** under development in Queensland and seek an update about climate change adaptation planning in the NSW section of the Gondwana Rainforests.
8. **Note** the positive initiatives for enhanced involvement of **Aboriginal peoples and Traditional Owners** in the management and protection of heritage on both sides of the border and recommend a timely progression of these initiatives across the World Heritage area.
9. **Appreciate** the valuable overview of investment in **threatened species management** in the Queensland section of the Gondwana Rainforests, and keenly anticipate a similar briefing from the NSW threatened species management program (Saving our Species) in due course.
10. **Advise** of recent **additional records of the Pink Underwing Moth *Phyllodes imperialis*** southern subspecies (caterpillar stage pictured on the right), an EPBC-listed endangered species. As recently as 2016, there was only one record for the Gold Coast. There are now four recorded locations in the Upper Numinbah and Currumbin valleys.



Photo: Paul Donatui

11. **Strongly encourage** the agencies to put the draft **Strategic Management Framework** for the property out to public consultation after a very long time.
12. **Appreciate** the update on the progress in **management planning** in each state, and recent progress in Queensland in this area is commended. The advisory committees seek further information from NSW on the timeframes for the renewal of all plans of management consistent with the Strategic Management Framework.
13. **Welcome** the news that **State of the Parks reporting** will be undertaken for the Gondwana Rainforest reserves in both NSW and Queensland.
14. **Note** that the consultation process for **IUCN World Heritage Outlook reporting** was inadequate and look forward to an improvement in process and to being able to support the reporting process in the future.
15. **Urge** the Australian, New South Wales and Queensland Governments and senior environment officers in the respective agencies to treat the **myrtle rust threat** to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage reserves extremely seriously. The rapid spread and extraordinary impact of this pathogen poses a significant threat to the Gondwana Rainforests and urgent action is advised (further details and recommendations in the inset overleaf).
16. **Urge** the preparation of a **nomination for the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area (extensions to an existing property)**. A working group of Advisory Committee members has been established to identify ways to progress the preparation of a nomination to extend the property.
17. **Advise** that, in the absence of responses to information requested, concerns remain about the possible approval of the **Scenic Rim Trail in Queensland**. Many Advisory Committee members consider, given the available information, that approval of the activity would not be in the interests of World Heritage protection and management nor in the interests of the community. Further information will be welcomed and a meeting with Minister Enoch may be sought, pending the outcome of the determination under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

We appreciate the opportunity to support the continued efforts to transmit the outstanding universal value of the Gondwana Rainforests to future generations.

Sincerely,

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Myrtle rust

- The Advisory Committees are alarmed by the rapid spread and extraordinary impact of myrtle rust up and down the east coast of Australia and the potential impact on hundreds of species of Myrtaceae, including many species characteristic of or confined to the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area.
- Some species of rainforest Myrtaceae may already be extinct in the wild, and more are likely to follow, perhaps many.
- The Advisory Committees urge the Australian, New South Wales and Queensland Governments and senior environment officers in the respective agencies to treat the myrtle rust threat to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia WHA extremely seriously.
- The Advisory Committees urge the respective governments to act immediately and heed the call of experts associated with the CRC for Plant Biosecurity for:
 - support for emergency conservation actions, including urgent efforts to collect and propagate *Lenwebbia* sp. 'Main Range', a threatened species in the Gondwana Rainforests at immediate risk of global extinction (i.e. not just localised extinction of a population, but extinction of the species);
 - monitoring of the impact of the spread and proliferation of myrtle rust
 - targeted research to minimise the impact of myrtle rust
 - cross-border germplasm and seed collection programs and research to ensure the survival of all affected Myrtaceae, at least ex situ
 - inclusion of myrtle rust as a separate program area in the Environment Stream of the National Landcare Program (it is currently included in the agriculture stream of the NLP)
 - development of collaborative relationships with key institutions and NGOs to promote awareness, scientific understanding, education, and resistance breeding to counter the threat
 - cultural impacts being placed on the agenda and for a dialogue to commence with Traditional Owners about the myrtle rust threat
 - establishment of a public–private foundation or trust to help fund recovery actions outside of normal funding streams.
- The Advisory Committees agreed to review the draft action plan, when published, and provide further advice to the Ministers and agencies, as required.