



## Gondwana World Heritage Advisory Committee (Qld Section) – Communiqué

Finalised 7 December 2023



### Background

The inaugural meeting of the Gondwana World Heritage Advisory Committee (Queensland Section) (the Committee) was held on the Yugambeh Country at Binna Burra from 20-22 November 2023.

The Committee comprises an independent chair and sixteen members. The role of the Committee is to provide advice to the State and Commonwealth Government on matters relating to the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage of the Queensland section of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area (hereafter Gondwana Rainforests WHA) from First Nations, scientific and community perspectives. This was the first Committee meeting held for the Gondwana Rainforests property for over four years. Following a governance review the Queensland specific Committee includes representation from the Yugambeh, Githabul, and Yuggera Ugarapul First Nation peoples (six in total), and from community, industry, and scientific/technical interests.

### Welcome to Country and Committee

The Committee greatly appreciated the Welcome to Country, smoking ceremony, and voices of the Yugambeh people, Germaine Paulson and Brendan Knight, on behalf of Uncle Kenny Markwell, who opened the meeting in traditional language.

The Committee deeply appreciated the opportunity to meet face-to-face and on Country with Traditional Owners who invited us to embark on a learning journey together. Their knowledge and participation reminded us of the significance of reconnecting with and hearing Country and one another in the special place that is the Gondwana Rainforest WHA. These types of connections to people and Country are not possible online.

### Sobering context of great challenge

The Committee noted that the last time an Advisory Committee for the Gondwana Rainforests WHA met was 8 September 2019, and immediately afterwards, historic Binna Burra Lodge burned down, and Lamington National Park and many other parts of the WHA were severely impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires. In its 2023 report ([UNESCO World Heritage Centre - Decision - 45 COM 7B.79](#)), the UNESCO World Heritage Committee noted with concern the negative impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires and the ongoing impacts of myrtle rust, and in 2020 the IUCN assessed the conservation outlook for the property as of “significant concern”.

In this sobering context, the Committee emphasises:

- Climate change, and associated heatwaves, drought, and lifting of cloud cover, is an existential threat to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA.
- Additional resources of more than \$2 million over the past three years for WHA management actions, projects and monitoring post-bushfire recovery were of great benefit.
- The Gondwana Rainforests WHA is now facing similar weather conditions of drought and heatwaves as those that preceded the 2019-20 bushfires. The Committee noted that additional resources allocated post-bushfire are no longer available.

- Since 2019, visitation to Queensland reserves in the Gondwana Rainforests WHA has greatly increased because of the impact of COVID 19 (particularly the lifting of lockdown measures) and population growth, adding further pressure to the property's OUV.
- The additional financial support of more than \$2 million over the past three years is essential to support ongoing recovery and resilience of Gondwana Rainforests WHA and should be continued to avoid further deterioration and the risk of further progress towards the "critically endangered" IUCN rating.
- The Country of the Gondwana Rainforest WHA is in urgent need of healing, which requires a long-term ongoing focus on restoring and maintaining OUV.

### **Action to mitigate climate change through reduction of pollution**

Despite evidence suggesting continuation of a trajectory consistent with Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5, known as the high-emissions pathway, the Committee acknowledges the steps taken to date towards reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by both Queensland and Australian Governments. We urge both to show global leadership in taking further urgent action. Gondwana Rainforests WHA faces an existential threat from climate warming as a result of GHG pollution, and urgent, rapid reduction of emissions is essential to maintain its OUV.

### **Plans and priorities**

The Committee focused attention on establishing a firm foundation for its work through initiating a three-year plan, and through establishing relationships of respect, trust, and mutual understanding. Our planning process will ensure our work is embedded in the long-term perspectives of First Nations peoples and others, reflecting deep time and current and future trajectories of change and dynamism. A Working Group of five Committee members and the Chair, supported by the secretariat, has been established to advance the draft plan.

### **Key areas for enhanced focus and attention**

The Committee identified an initial set of priority areas for enhanced focus and attention in our Advisory capacity while continuing the development of the three-year plan, and the existing focus on climate change adaptation and cultural values through current funded projects.

1. **Integrated Indigenous Management:** exploring the status and options for enhancement, for example through co-management, Indigenous Protected Areas, Indigenous ranger programs, funding for Indigenous initiatives, working with Indigenous science and knowledge, cultural burning, cultural management of land and waters, cultural protocols, and genuine, authentic, and ongoing partnerships.
2. **Monitoring of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of Gondwana:** exploring the status and options for enhancement, for example monitoring that is systematic and long-term, inclusive of Indigenous and western scientific knowledge, and focuses on the attributes that underpin OUV.
3. **Buffer management and connectivity to protect OUV:** exploring the status and options for enhanced actions for example through engagement with, and guidelines for local government, local management agencies and adjacent landholders, using data to identify the spatial and temporal locale of OUV and threats to the WHA, increased effort into pest control and biosecurity, condition assessment, and targeted stewardship support, tenure protection and acquisition.
4. **Visitor management:** exploring the status and options for enhanced management for example through improved interpretation, identification and mitigation of impacts, education, communication, signage, an overarching and individual park plans for interpretation and visitation, and opportunities for First Nations interpretation and visitor management.

The Committee will also develop a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

The Committee highlighted other key areas for attention which will be addressed through the planning process including managing fires and other high-order threats, expanding the World Heritage Area boundary, gaining a better understanding of the evolutionary and ecological

processes of the property and its OUV, preventing extinctions and ecosystem collapse, undertaking system risk assessment.

### **Financial resources**

The Committee notes that leveraging effort in all these areas will require significant financial resources. In addition, finances available to support the Committee meetings are limited, have remained static for almost two decades and are not sufficient to enable all the crucial conversations and connections that occur through meetings on Country with First Nations people. The Committee intends to further investigate options for resourcing, and we look forward to providing information on mechanisms for enhanced conservation finance.

### **Reporting**

The Committee received a wealth of reports and information from the Queensland, New South Wales and Australian Government public servants present at the meeting, including:

- An overview of the World Heritage Convention, Outstanding Universal Value, and the coordination of governance across the New South Wales and Queensland sections of Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area
- A history of the Gondwana Rainforest World Heritage Area, its listing and ongoing management
- The First Nations Partnership framework of the Queensland Government, including the Gurra Gurra Framework 2020-2026 and the Queensland First Nations World Heritage Strategy
- The State of Conservation, periodic and other reporting from the Australian Government to the World Heritage Committee
- The progress with the priority Climate Adaptation and Cultural Values projects
- The management by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service of the Lamington National Park
- The management by the New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service of the New South Wales section of the Gondwana Rainforest World Heritage Area.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Committee would like to thank the Yugambah First Nations representative Germaine Paulson and guest Brendan Knight on behalf of Uncle Kenny Markwell for welcoming our meeting on their traditional lands and the Binna Burra Lodge for their hospitality and fine provision of food and accommodation. We would also like to thank the Queensland, New South Wales and Australian Government public servants for the high levels of collaboration, information sharing, secretarial and logistic support, and overall professionalism displayed in supporting the Committee.