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THE GOVERNMENT OF NORFOLK ISLAND

MEDIA RELEASE

World Heritage listing - what does it really mean?

There has been much discussion in the community about the proposal for World Heritage listing for the Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area. Minister for the Environment, Education and Social Welfare, the Hon Vicky Jack MLA, said today that she intended to publish a series of questions and answers over coming weeks to help inform the Norfolk Island community about the significance and details of the nomination of KAVHA for World Heritage listing. Here are the first questions and answers:

Q. What is World Heritage?

A. The term World Heritage is applied to sites of outstanding universal natural or cultural significance, which are included on the World Heritage List.

World Heritage listing is a recognition by the international community that an area is such an outstanding example of the world's natural or cultural heritage, that its conservation is of concern to all people. As at 2006 there were 830 World Heritage properties on the World Heritage List. Of these, 644 are listed for their cultural heritage values, 162 are listed for natural heritage values, and 24 are listed for both cultural and natural heritage values.

The World Heritage List is administered under the World Heritage Convention by the World Heritage Committee on behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Paris.

Q. What is the World Heritage Convention?

A. The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (The World Heritage Convention) was adopted by UNESCO in 1972.

The Convention aims to promote cooperation among nations to protect natural and cultural heritage which is of such outstanding universal value that its conservation is of concern to all people. 183 countries had become States Parties to the Convention at October 2006.

Australia was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention, becoming a State Party to the Convention in 1974. By ratifying the Convention the Australian Government accepted the duty of ensuring that Australia's natural and cultural heritage of international significance is identified, protected and maintained for the benefit of future generations.

The Convention is administered by the international World Heritage Committee, which decides whether areas nominated by Parties [the Australian Government] to the Convention are placed on the World Heritage List.

Q. What makes an area worthy of World Heritage listing?

A. In order to qualify for inclusion on the World Heritage List, a nominated area must be of great universal significance and meet at least one out of ten specific criteria for outstanding natural and/or cultural values.

These criteria are explained in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, which, besides the text of the Convention, is the main working tool on World Heritage. The criteria are regularly revised by the Committee to reflect the evolution of the World Heritage concept itself. The criteria are:

1. to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
2. to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
3. to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
4. to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
5. to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
6. to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);
7. to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
8. to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
9. to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
10. to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

The protection, management, authenticity and integrity of properties are also important considerations.

Since 1992 significant interactions between people and the natural environment have been recognized as cultural landscapes.

Mrs Jack said that more information on World Heritage issues was available from the Department of the Environment and Water Resources website at <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/worldheritage/> or the UNESCO World Heritage site <http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>

Stephanie V Jack
Minister for the Environment, Education and Social Welfare

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