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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL  
ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL  
AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Twenty-fourth session

Cairns, Australia

27 November – 2 December 2000

**Information Document: Report of the World Heritage Fossil Sites Workshop, Sydney,  
Australia, 22 September – 1 October 2000**

## SUMMARY

A conference on World Heritage Fossil sites was held in Australia from 22 September to 1 October 2000. The conference brought together representatives from World Heritage Fossil sites throughout the world and IUCN and included a field visit to the World Heritage site of Naracoorte and Riversleigh. Conference participants explored management issues peculiar to fossil sites, effective methods for maintaining and enhancing World Heritage values through research, and ways and means for interpreting the significance and values of fossil sites to a wide range of stakeholders. In addition, methods for managing tourism were considered and experience on effective methods of protection was shared. Specific recommendations deriving from the conference to the consideration of the Committee are presented in this document.

**Action required:** The Committee may wish to take note of the recommendations.

## **FIRST CONFERENCE ON WORLD HERITAGE FOSSIL SITES: MEETING RECOMMENDATIONS**

A Conference on World Heritage Fossil Sites was held in Australia from 22 September to 1 October 2000. The Conference was organised by the University of New South Wales in Sydney with support from the Federal Department of Environment and Heritage and the Australian Museum in Sydney. Other organisations also provided assistance with the Conference.

Representatives from World Heritage Fossil Sites around the world attended together with a representative of IUCN and a number of Australian participants involved with the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites World Heritage property. A full list of participants is attached as Annex I.

The agenda for the Conference included field visits to the World Heritage property sites at Naracoorte and Riversleigh, a workshop at Mt Isa and a formal meeting at the University of New South Wales. This agenda is attached as Annex II.

The objectives of the formal meeting were to explore management issues peculiar to fossil sites viz the overlapping needs for extractive research, interpretation, tourism & protection—which sometimes appear to be conflicting—or at least contradictory needs. More specifically:

- To explore effective methods for maintaining and enhancing World Heritage values through research;
- To explore effective methods for interpreting the significance and value of fossil sites to the often very wide-range range of stakeholders;
- To explore effective methods for managing tourism;
- To share experiences about effective methods for protecting World Heritage values; and
- To conceive and commit to development of a network of communication that creates in perpetuity a global ‘thinktank’ of stakeholders in World Heritage fossil sites

The meeting participants wished to bring to the attention of all relevant organisations and authorities concerned with World Heritage, fossil sites and geological sites the following points and recommendations from the meeting, bearing in mind the forthcoming World Heritage Committee meeting in Cairns;

### **General Points**

1. Participants noted the significance and value of identifying, protecting, conserving, presenting and transmitting to future generations a record of life on earth which can best be represented by geological and fossil sites. Such sites are more than isolated examples of our past. They enable us to understand life on earth today and can also be used to help us shape the future.

2. This perspective through time is important as it enables important links to be made between such sites from the past to present day ‘natural’ sites as well as cultural sites which also represent our past. Participants also noted that a number of sites, while considered to be ‘natural’ sites also had important geological values or included fossil sites of significance and these needed to be recognised. While these links are important, it was noted that the reason a number of these sites had been inscribed on the World Heritage List was because of the fossils and this needed to be recognised in the management of the area concerned.

3. Participants supported the IUCN Global Theme Studies by Rod Wells on fossil sites and by Paul Dingwall on Geologically protected areas (currently in preparation) as well as other initiatives in this field by Pro Geo and UNESCO which recently held a workshop/meeting in Rio de Janeiro as part of the 31<sup>st</sup> International Geological Congress. They were keen to lend their expertise to assist international organisations such as UNESCO, IUCN in assisting countries with sites of significance in the protection and presentation of these sites, particularly if such sites may be considered for nomination to the World Heritage List.

The meeting focussed on issues peculiar to the management of fossil sites in particular the need for ongoing research to maintain and enhance World Heritage values, interpreting and communicating the significance and value of these sites, managing tourism and protecting the World Heritage values of the site in the interests of all diverse stakeholders and interests. Most of these topics are interrelated and integrated management planning needs to recognise this. Participants also noted that many of the specific points are common to all sites. While there were a few particular issues which were only relevant to a particular property, most issues were relevant to all World Heritage fossil sites.

## **Specific Points**

### **Research for Management**

Participants considered that research was the 'lifeblood' of management of these sites and there was a need for long term secure sources of funding which would guarantee that this research would continue. Different countries had different sources of funding for research but that a lack of secure long term funding was a major limiting factor in research which in turn meant a lack of information for proper management of the property. Without long term funding for research, the values of the World Heritage area would not be advanced and could be diminished. It was agreed that this needed to be brought to the attention of all those organisations and authorities responsible for the World Heritage property as a matter of priority. While participants also noted the diverse sources of funding for research, it considered the primary responsibility for funding this research lay with those responsible for managing the property.

Participants also recommended the development of long term plans for research and the need for the management and coordination of this research as the basis for the overall management of the property. Research was not simply collecting material but was more strategic and the primary factor in considering the management of the area.

### **Transfer of Information/Communication**

Participants strongly supported the transfer of research information to all stakeholders, particularly those associated with the management of the area concerned. Many examples were given at the meeting of this type of information transfer/interpretation. However, it was noted that there was a need to dedicate resources to the production of such material which should be in addition to the resources required for research and other tasks and that all of these functions and tasks needed coordination.

### **Tourism**

Issues related to tourism were discussed and while there were many benefits, some negative impacts may result. The negative impacts needed to be minimised and controlled sustainable tourism is a key element of an integrated management plan. Participants stressed the need for tourists to be educated and informed about the site, the significance of it and issues related to the

management of it. The establishment of a Visitors Centre or Interpretive Centre at the main access point of the site was seen as essential.

### **Protection of Fossil Sites**

A range of issues related to the protection of the sites were discussed and participants urged all organisations responsible to ensure protection of the sites through provision of funding for policing and surveillance as part of an integrated management plan.

### **World Heritage Fossil and Geological Sites**

Participants recognised that the number and type of World Heritage Fossil and Geological sites currently on the WH List did not adequately represent a record of life on Earth and encouraged all signatories to the World Heritage Convention to nominate areas as part of a systematic and strategic approach. There was a need for thorough planning as part of the nomination. In this regard, participants endorsed the adoption of the assessment process used for the Miguasha nomination by Canada.

### **Communication**

Participants undertook to establish an international network of stakeholders in World Heritage Fossil Sites which would communicate electronically and meet at regular intervals to progress issues related to World Heritage Fossil Sites, such as those considered at the first Conference and noted in these recommendations. As a first initiative, there was endorsement of a suite of books on World Heritage fossil sites as proposed by the representative from the Miguasha site.

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

The following participants attended the World Heritage Fossil Sites Conference.

Note: # denotes participation at Naracoorte

\* denotes participation in Sydney

^ denotes participation at Mount Isa

**#\*^Dr Stephan Schaal**

Representative for the Messel Fossil Site, Germany

**#\*^Professor Phillip Currie****#\*^Dr Eva Koppelhus**

Representatives for the Dinosaur Provincial Park Fossil Site, Canada

**#\*^Dr Marius Arsenault**

Representative for the Miguasha Fossil Site, Quebec, Canada

**\*Professor William Sill**

Representative for the Ishigualasto-Talampaya Provincial Nature Reserve, Argentina

**#\*^Ms Melinda Swift**

Representative for the 'Cradle of Humankind' Site, South Africa

**#\*^Dr Paul Dingwall**

Assessor of World Heritage Fossil Sites

Representative of IUCN

**#\*Associate Professor Rod Wells****#\*Mr Brian Clark**

Representatives for the Naracoorte Site, Australia

**\*^Professor Michael Archer****^Dr Suzanne Hand****\*^Mr Philip Creaser****\*^Mr Henk Godthelp**

Representatives for the Riversleigh Site, Australia

**\*^Ms Barbara Bohdanowicz**

Conference Coordinator, Australian Museum, Sydney

**\*Mr Jonas Rupp****\*^Ms Maryanne Humphreys**

Federal Department of Environment and Heritage, Canberra, Australia

**\*Dr Tim Flannery****Dr Neville Pledge****\*Dr Ben McHenry**

South Australian Museum

**\*Dr Jane Gilmour**

Director, Earthwatch Institute, Australia

**^Mr Andrew Border**

**^Ms Helen Smith**

Queensland Environmental Protection Agency

**^Mr George Townsend**

**^Mr Clive Cook**

**^Mr Larry Burgin**

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

**^Ms Eunice O'Keefe**

**^Ms Shirley Chong**

**^Mr Big Bird**

**^Mr Barry Dick**

**^Mr Richard Brookdale**

Representatives of the Waanyi Nation , the Lawn Hill/ Riversleigh Pastoral Company and the Carpentaria Land Council

**^Mr Glen Graham**

Manager, Riversleigh Interpretative Centre, Mount Isa

**^Mr Alan Rackham Jnr**

Pasminco Preparation Laboratory, Mount Isa

**^Mr Lloyd Campbell**

Campbell's Coaches, Mount Isa

**^Mr Kent Quigley**

Pasminco Century Mine, Lawn Hill

**^Ms Jan Bimrose**

**^Ms Di Waters**

Tourism Development Team, Queensland Department of State Development

**^Ms Barbara Mullins**

Mount Isa

**\*^Mr James Woodford**

Journalist, Sydney Morning Herald

**^Mr Brendan Esposito**

Photographer, Sydney Morning Herald

**^Mr Tony McGrady**

Minister for Mines and Energy

Minister Assisting the Deputy Premier on Regional Development

**^Representative of the Burke Shire Council Burketown**

## AGENDA

### WORLD HERITAGE FOSSIL SITE CONFERENCE PROGRAM 22 September – 1 October 2000

#### Day One

**Friday 22 September**

Adelaide to Naracoorte Caves

#### Day Two

**Saturday 23 September**

Naracoorte Caves then back to Adelaide

Tour of Naracoorte Caves with A/Prof Rod Wells and Brian Clark

#### Day Three

**Sunday 24 September**

Adelaide

1.30 pm Visit to the South Australia Museum, hosted by Dr Tim Flannery and Dr Neville Pledge.

#### Day Four

**Monday 25 September**

University of New South Wales, Kensington Sydney

Travel from Adelaide to Sydney

1.30 pm Tour of the Vertebrate Palaeontology Laboratories, Biological Sciences Building.

#### SESSION 1

3.00 pm Welcome and Introduction – Professors John Niland and Mike Archer

3.15 pm International World Heritage Fossil and Geological Site Issues -  
Dr Paul Dingwall and A/Prof Rod Wells

4.00 pm Australian Government perspectives on World Heritage –  
Mr Jonas Rupp

#### Day Five

**Tuesday 26 September**

University of New South Wales, Sydney

#### SESSION 2

9.00 am Management Issues of World Heritage Fossil Sites  
(chaired by Mike Archer)

Presentation by each participant on their site with a focus on management issues

11.00 am *Morning tea*

- 11.15 am Round table on common management issues  
(Chaired by Phil Creaser and Henk Godthelp)
- 12 noon The role of research in management
- 12.30 pm Promotion of fossil sites: a two edged sword
- 1.00 pm *Lunch*
- 2.00 pm Development of broad management principles/guidelines  
to assist other managers
- International network for World Heritage Fossil Sites  
(may include geological sites)
- Future meetings
- 3.30 pm Meeting close
- 4.30 pm Visit to Australian Museum Australia's Lost Kingdoms Exhibition
- 7.00 pm The Australian Museum Society (TAMS) lecture by Dr Philip Currie

**Day Six**  
**Wednesday 27 September**  
Sydney

*Rest Day*

- 6.00 pm Function hosted by the Riversleigh Society

**Day Seven**  
**Thursday 28 September**  
Sydney to Mount Isa

- 12 noon Arrive Mount Isa
- 1.00 pm Lunch and tour of the Riversleigh Interpretative Centre and the Pasmaenco Preparation Lab at Mount Isa
- 3.00 pm Surface tour of Mount Isa mine
- 7.00 pm Buffet dinner at the Riversleigh Interpretative Centre hosted by the Mount Isa City Council

**Day Eight**  
**Friday 29 September**  
Riversleigh Interpretative Centre, Mount Isa – Riversleigh

- 9.00 am Presentation by Riversleigh stakeholders, eg. Waanyi elders, Lawn Hill Pastoral Holding Company, Tourism representatives, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Pasmaenco, and UNSW researchers



- 10.30 am Morning Tea
- 11.00 am Round table discussion of issues raised. Input from international fossil site managers to assist in Riversleigh management.
- 12 noon Lunch in the conference room of the Interpretative Centre
- 1.00 pm Flight to Riversleigh
- 3.00 pm Visit to “D” site, Riversleigh

**Day Nine**  
**Saturday 30 September**  
**Riversleigh**

Further visit to sites at Riversleigh

**Day Ten**  
**Sunday 1 October**  
**Mount Isa /Brisbane/Sydney**

- 9.00 am Flight from Riversleigh to Mount Isa
- 11.10am Flight to Sydney / Brisbane