NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES: A PERSPECTIVE FROM AUSTRALIA

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Introduction

Australia is in the process of enacting national heritage legislation that is a considerable departure from the Australian Heritage Commission Act of 1975. Under the new regime, places entered on to the National Heritage List (NHL) will be the focus of the Commonwealth’s heritage management role. The concept of a National Heritage List has been strongly influenced by World Heritage listing, but in this instance refers to places assessed to be of ‘outstanding’ national significance. Conservation of these places will be guided by a set of ‘National Heritage management principles’ given force through management and conservation plans. The National Heritage management principles are in the process of being drafted with public and professional participation being sought. This paper is a comparison of the proposed principles with those embodied in the charters of the scientific committees of ICOMOS, in particular the International Committee for Archaeological Heritage Management (ICHAM) and the International Committee for Cultural Tourism.

It is asserted that principles are only one aspect of heritage management, and perhaps they are all too easily corrupted unless there is an effective management framework to give force to those principles. In the 1990s due to an unrelenting series of conflicts between conservationists and industry, Australia undertook a nation-wide evaluation of its forestry industry. As part of the Ecological Sustainable forest Management program (refer to note), not only were processes developed for community involvement in the identification of heritage places (Figures 1 and 2; and Context Pty Ltd 1999), but a framework for evaluating effective management activities and a set of principles were developed. The outcomes of the RF A process along with the Australian Natural Heritage Charter and Ask first: a guide to respecting Indigenous heritage places and values provide further insights into management principles for the conservation of places of both cultural and natural significance.

Australia’s heritage regime

In 1975, the Australian Heritage Commission was established to identify and register the National Estate having social, aesthetic, scientific and historic values; comprising indigenous, historic and natural places. That process led to development of the Register of the National Estate (RNE) which as of 20 June 2002 includes some 12,941 places; comprised of 909 Indigenous places, 9,968 Historic places, and 2,064 Natural places. These figures reflect the composition of the RNE as being made up of both natural and cultural places of local, state, national and international significance. As Australia is a federation of states and territories, the direct land management responsibilities of the national/Commonwealth government are for the most part restricted to the territories (Jervis Bay Territory, etc) or to its own lands and properties (defence estate, lighthouses, post offices, etc). As such, places listed on the Register of the National Estate (RNE) enjoy protection from the actions of the Commonwealth but are only protected from other actions if they are also on a state, territory or local government heritage list. The Commonwealth regards the agencies of the states and territories, and local governments as responsible for heritage places, except for those that lie upon Commonwealth lands and are entered on the ‘Commonwealth List’, or are determined to be of national significance.

National Heritage management principles

Under the new legislation, as a proposed amendment to the Environment, Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Protection Act 1999, those places listed on the National Heritage Register (NHR) will be managed in accordance with the National Heritage management principles. The draft principles are remarkably brief, numbering six:

1 The primary purpose in managing National Heritage places is to identify, protect, conserve, present, and transmit to future generations the National Heritage values.
2 The management of National Heritage places should make continuing use of best available knowledge, skills and standards for the place and, in particular, provide for ongoing technical and community input to decisions and actions that may have a significant impact on their National Heritage values.
3 The management of National Heritage places should promote the integration of any Commonwealth, State, Territory and local government responsibilities for those places.