

Tasmanian Wilderness:

The State Party's inadequate draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Inscribed in 1982 and extended (with additional OUV such as tall-eucalypt forests) in 1989, the Tasmanian Wilderness requires a retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV). The process of creating the retrospective SOUV has been lengthy, opaque and adversely affected by the recent political agendas of the governments concerned.

In February 2010, a draft SOUV was submitted by the Australian Government (the State Party) to the World Heritage Centre as part of a state-of-conservation report¹. It is not clear what became of this draft; it appears never to have made it to the stage of being submitted for approval to the World Heritage Committee.

In 2014, the Wilderness Society learnt from the State Party that a new draft SOUV had been prepared and was intended to be presented to the World Heritage Committee for approval in 2015, an intention confirmed in the 2014 draft Management Plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness². This did not occur.

The Wilderness Society obtained a copy of the 2014 draft SOUV using 'freedom of information' laws. (The 2014 draft SOUV appears never to have been formally published) A comparison of the 2010 and 2014 drafts reveals that the document changed significantly. There are positives in some of the changes (the 2014 draft is generally more succinct and a section on authenticity has been added for cultural heritage) and some negatives (weaker descriptions of some cultural heritage, of the wild coastline, of buttongrass as a key habitat). However, the overriding difference between the two draft statements pertains to wilderness.

The draft retrospective SOUV and wilderness

The 2014 draft SOUV is characterised by an almost complete elimination of an attribute crucial to the values, character, integrity and management of the Tasmanian Wilderness – that of wilderness itself.

This is apparent in the following ways:

- Removal of the words 'one of the world's largest temperate wilderness areas' from the opening paragraph of the preamble;
- Reference to wilderness under Criterion (viii) omitted;
- Deletion of the words 'a primary value of the area resides within, and is protected by, its extensive area and essentially wild and largely undisturbed nature' from Criterion (ix).

According to the World Heritage Committee's advisory bodies³, a retrospective SOUV should be based largely on the nomination and evaluation documents that led to the listing of the area. In the case of the Tasmanian Wilderness, those documents extolled the value of wilderness as a major attribute of the landscape of this World Heritage property.

The property was described in the first paragraph of the 1981 nomination document as 'one of the last remaining temperate wilderness areas in the world', a description repeated in the first paragraph of the 'justification' section⁴. The 1989 nomination document continued the emphasis on the importance of wilderness:

*The nominated area comprises most of the last great temperate wilderness remaining in Australia, and is one of only a few such regions in the world... It is this wilderness quality which underpins the success of the area in meeting all four criteria as a natural property and which is the foundation for the maintenance of the integrity of both the natural and cultural values which are displayed.*⁵

Evaluations of the nominations by IUCN echoed the identification of wilderness as an important attribute. The 1982 evaluation described the property as comprising 'one of the world's last great remaining temperate pristine wildernesses'⁶.

IUCN's 1989 evaluations described the property as 'mostly undisturbed wilderness' (p. 5), and mostly in a 'natural or near natural condition' (p. 9)⁷. A further evaluation by IUCN welcomed the addition of areas that added to the 'wilderness quality' of the property, saying:

The new proposed boundary greatly improves the integrity of the original area, includes a substantial portion of the range of many rare species, and increases the extent of wilderness reservation. (p. 7)⁸

The World Heritage Committee has, of course, implicitly recognised the importance of wilderness to the character of the property by approving the property's name – 'the Tasmanian Wilderness'.

There is another reason for including wilderness within the SOUV. The advisory bodies say:

The text of the brief synthesis should be clear, memorable and, ideally, inspirational. It should enable anyone unfamiliar with the property, as well as those who know it well, to understand immediately its scope, its significance and what has to be protected. It should be equally relevant to politicians, to academics and to the general public. (p.10)

The term 'wilderness' immediately evokes visions of an extensive and untamed landscape largely unmodified by modern technological society. It is a highly descriptive term that assists people unfamiliar with the property to visualise it.

Recommendations

To improve the process of preparing a comprehensive and descriptive SOUV, and to improve the SOUV itself, the following actions should occur:

- The State Party should publish its draft SOUV when it is submitted to the World Heritage Centre (as occurred in 2010);
- The description of the property, employed at the time of listing, as one of the great temperate wilderness areas on Earth should be reinstated in the SOUV's brief synthesis;
- The importance of wilderness as an attribute to criteria (vii), (viii), (ix) and (x) should be stated in the SOUV;
- The importance of wilderness in maintaining the integrity of both natural and cultural values should be stated in the parts of the SOUV relating to integrity and management;
- Many of the descriptions of key attributes should be re-written to make them less perfunctory and more descriptive. Their outstanding qualities must be made clearer.

¹ Appendix 3, *State Party Report on the State of Conservation of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (Australia) 2010, Property ID 181bis* by Australia, Co, Australian Government, <<http://www.environment.gov.au/resource/state-party-report-state-conservation-tasmanian-wilderness-world-heritage-area-australia-0>>

² Page 25, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment 2014, *Draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan*, by DPIPWE, Tasmanian Government, <<http://dpiuwe.tas.gov.au/conservation/tasmanian-wilderness-world-heritage-area/new-tasmanian-wilderness-world-heritage-area-management-plan>>

³ *Guidance on the preparation of retrospective Statements of Outstanding Universal Value for World Heritage properties*, ICCROM, ICOMOS, IUCN, 2010
<http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/wcpa_worldheritage/?5891/Guidance-on-the-preparation-of-retrospective-statements-of-Outstanding-Universal-Value-for-World-Heritage-Properties>

⁴ Pages 2, 14, *Nomination of Western Tasmania Wilderness National Parks by the Commonwealth of Australia for inclusion in the World Heritage List*, Tasmanian Government, Australian Heritage Commission, November 1981. <<http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/181ter.pdf>>

⁵ Page 27, 1989 nomination document (Government 1982, 1989, 2010)
<<http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/181ter.pdf>>

⁶ World Heritage Nomination Technical Review, IUCN, 15 April 1982

⁷ WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN SUMMARY S07: TASMANIAN WILDERNESS (AUSTRALIA)
(Revision to existing Property inscribed in 1982) April 1989

⁸ WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN SUMMARY S07: TASMANIAN WILDERNESS (AUSTRALIA)
(Revision to existing Property inscribed in 1982) October 1989