

Audrey Azouley
Director General
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By email A.Azoulay@unesco.org

4 September 2020

Dear Director-General,

We bring to your attention alarming moves by the Australian Government to weaken legal protection for Australia's 20 World Heritage listed properties.

As a founding member and ratified signatory to the World Heritage Convention (the Convention), the Australian Government has international legal responsibility as a State Party to identify, protect, conserve, present and transmit to future generations its World Heritage listed sites. This global responsibility is made all the more apparent by Australia's current membership of the World Heritage Committee.

Australia is proud to have more natural World Heritage sites than any other nation, yet many of these sites are under more pressure from industrialisation and climate change than ever before.

Recent and ongoing threats include; the NSW state government's proposed flooding of 4,700 hectares of the Greater Blue Mountains WHA for an enlarged Warragamba Dam, the Tasmanian State Government's inadequate resourcing of fire management plus inadequate assessment and promotion of a pipeline of inappropriate private tourism projects in the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA, threats to the Ningaloo Coast WHA from oil and gas industrialisation, the damage to more than 50% of the Gondwana Rainforest WHA from climate change fuelled bushfires, inappropriate and cumulative development and infrastructure pressures from local and federal governments on the Wet Tropics WHA and the third mass coral bleaching event on the Great Barrier Reef WHA in the last five years.

Under Australia's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*, a person must refer a development proposal to the Australian Government for approval if it is likely to have a significant impact on a World Heritage property. Yet at the very moment the Australian Government ought to be demonstrating its global leadership on World Heritage protection, it is rushing a bill through the Australian Parliament that would hand its national development approval powers under the EPBC Act over to state and territory (provincial) governments without any safeguards in place. This is of grave concern because state and territory governments are often the proponents of these threatening developments and activities or have policies that encourage and fast-track them.

As the global governing body ultimately responsible for safeguarding World Heritage, we ask UNESCO to urgently write to the Australian Environment Minister, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, to express alarm at the Australian Government's decision to rush legislation through parliament devolving decision-making about World Heritage properties to state and territory governments, and to seek clarification on how the Australian Government will meet its international responsibilities under the World Heritage Convention.

The Australian Government must not walk away from its responsibilities to protect and conserve World Heritage.

Yours sincerely



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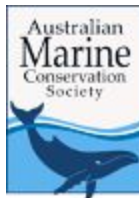
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cc:

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