

WET TROPICS SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage (the World Heritage Convention) was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in Paris on 16 November 1972. The World Heritage Convention came into force in 1975. The World Heritage Convention promotes cooperation among nations, in order to identify and protect heritage that is of Outstanding Universal Value and ensure its conservation for current and future generations. Australia ratified the Convention in August 1974.

The Wet Tropics of Queensland was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1998. The Wet Tropics stretches along the northeast coast of Australia for some 450km. Encompassing 894,420 hectares of mostly tropical rainforest, this stunningly beautiful area is extremely important for its rich and unique biodiversity. It also presents an unparalleled record of the ecological and evolutionary processes that shaped the flora and fauna of Australia, containing the relicts of the great Gondwanan forest that covered Australia and part of Antarctica 50 to 100 million years ago. All of Australia's unique marsupials and most of its other animals originated in rainforest ecosystems, and their closest surviving relatives occur in the Wet Tropics. These living relicts of the Gondwanan era and their subsequent diversification provide unique insights to the process of evolution in general. They also provide important information for the interpretation of fossils of plants and animals found elsewhere in Australia, and about the evolution of Australia's sclerophyll flora and marsupial fauna in particular.

Under the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993* (the Act), the Wet Tropics Management Authority is established to ensure that Australia's obligation under the World Heritage Convention is met in relation to the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (the Area). Australia's obligation is to protect, conserve, present and transmit to future generations the Area. Approximately 80% of the Area is now national park tenure with day-to-day management being provided by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. 37% of the Area has been recognised as Native Title determined with another 24% currently under application for Native Title.

The Authority comprises of a board of seven directors and approximately 20 staff. The Wet Tropics Board is responsible for the way the Authority performs its functions and exercises its powers. It is also the role of the Board to decide objectives, strategies and policies to be followed by the Authority. The Authority's strategic goals are espoused in its [Strategic Plan 2013–2018](#). The Board has recently outlined its [key priorities for 2015–2018](#) in line with the Strategic Plan.

Under the Act, the Authority is required to establish two statutory committees: a community consultative committee and a scientific advisory committee.

2. Purpose of the Wet Tropics Scientific Advisory Committee

As outlined under Schedule 1 of the Act, the function of the Scientific Advisory Committee (the Committee) is to advise the Authority's Board on scientific research that will contribute to the protection and conservation of the Area and scientific developments relevant to the protection or conservation of the Area. In addition, the Committee is to provide advice on—

- scientific research and monitoring priorities which will contribute to the protection, conservation, rehabilitation and presentation of the Area
- new information or developments in science relevant to protection, conservation or presentation of the Area
- scientific basis of management principles, policies and practices
- application of science to management challenges and issues
- appropriateness of research proposed for approval by the Authority and other relevant agencies in terms of scope, quality and relevance to management of the Area
- maintenance of World Heritage values and integrity of the Area
- impacts of proposed developments on the World Heritage values of the Area
- engagement between the scientific community and the management agencies and communities in the Wet Tropics.

In addition to the above functions, the Board is looking to the Committee to:

- facilitate and support implementation of the Authority's Wet Tropics Research Strategy 2014—2018 and associated 'learning landscapes' initiatives.

3. Membership

The Committee will comprise of approximately eight members.

Committee membership will be based on scientific expertise and knowledge relevant to the protection, conservation, rehabilitation and presentation of the Area e.g. biophysical, bio-cultural or economics expertise; social sciences (including governance) or nature-based tourism/recreation sciences.

Preferably members will have active research interests with application or relevance to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and will be associated with a range of institutions.

Committee membership will also include at least one person with traditional Indigenous knowledge associated with Rainforest Aboriginal peoples interests—the person may be, but need not necessarily be, a person with western scientific training.

Observers:

Board directors and officers from the Authority may attend Committee meetings with agreement from the Committee's Chair. Other guests, observers and specialist advisers may be invited by the Chair to attend and provide advice.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Wet Tropics Board is responsible for:

- Providing one of its directors as Chair of the Committee.
- Providing direction to the Committee on matters for which it is seeking scientific advice.

- Providing feedback via the Chair of the Committee regarding advice provided by the Committee to the Board.

Committee Chair is responsible for:

- Convening Committee meetings.
- Chairing Committee meetings in accordance with formal meeting protocols.
- Liaising with the Authority's secretariat as required to develop agendas and approve meeting minutes.
- Facilitating discussion on the agenda items, seeking consensus on issues and developing recommendations to provide to the Board.
- Maintaining adherence to the code of conduct at meetings.
- Reporting to the Board.
- Being the spokesperson on behalf of the Committee.
- Maintaining dialogue with the Authority and Committee members about ongoing and relevant issues in-between meetings to support progress of actions from meetings.

Members are responsible for:

- Following up on Committee actions as recorded in minutes.
- Maintaining confidentiality on identified sensitive issues.
- Consulting with other experts, industry and stakeholders and encouraging wider knowledge about Wet Tropics World Heritage issues and scientific information (subject to any overriding confidentiality and media provisions under these terms of reference).
- Endeavouring to reach consensus view on issues discussed at Committee meetings.
- Behaving in a professional manner and maintaining confidentiality on identified sensitive issues.

Secretariat is responsible for:

- Organising meetings.
- Ensuring an appropriate level of administrative support
- Dissemination of information to members
- Providing background information considered reasonably necessary to assist members in their deliberations.
- Preparing and distributing minutes of meetings.

5. Appointment of the Committee Chair

The Chair of the Committee will be a Board director appointed by the Chair of the Board.

6. Appointment of members

Appointment to the Committee will be by invitation of the Board following a call for expressions of interest. Consideration will be given to gender, cultural and other equity and diversity issues within the Committee.

7. Term of appointment

The term of the Committee shall be for a three year period commencing on the convening of the first committee meeting for the term. Committee members may be appointed for a maximum of two consecutive terms. Following a break of at least one term, previous members may be eligible for reappointment.

Members may resign at any time in writing to the Chair of the Board. Vacancies may be filled by invitation for a period to coincide with the Committee term

The Board will be mindful of the Committee's corporate memory and will give consideration to ensuring some continuity of membership between the outgoing and incoming committees.

8. Meeting attendance and time commitments

As membership of the Committee is on an honorary basis, the Authority is appreciative of time commitments made by members. Although no minimum time commitments are set, it is expected that members will attach a priority to attending and participating at Committee meetings. It is also expected that members will allocate appropriate preparation time for reading of agenda papers and responding to issues where the Committee's advice is sought.

In accordance with State Government policy, sitting fees will not be paid to Committee members.

Where a Committee member is not already covered for attending a Committee meeting by the member's employer or research institution, personal out-of-pocket expenses, including travel and living expenses associated with the attendance at Committee meetings will be met by the Authority at the standard State Government rate.

Termination

The Board reserves the right to terminate an individual's membership of the Committee at any time subject to procedural fairness. A termination notice must be in writing from the Chair of the Board.

The Chair of the Board may consider terminating a membership of the Committee if a member fails to attend two consecutive meetings without a valid reason.

9. Meeting location and frequency

Meetings will normally be held in Cairns. However, the Committee may meet in other Wet Tropics locations, particularly when there is an opportunity to inspect particular sites/issues of interest.

The Committee will meet at least two times per year and at other times as deemed necessary.

The Chair may agree to use contemporary communication technologies to hold meetings where this is deemed practical and efficient. Matters decided at these meetings must be noted by the Committee at the next formal meeting and be recorded in the minutes of that meeting.