

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This petition seeks, pursuant to Article 11 paragraph 4 of the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* ("The Convention"), the inclusion of The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area ("GBMWhA") on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The GBMWhA is inscribed on the World Heritage List for its representation of the evolutionary adaptation and diversification of the Eucalyptus in post-Gondwana isolation on the Australian Continent. More than 100 eucalypt taxa have now been recorded within the Greater Blue Mountain Area, which is also outstanding for its exceptional expression of the structural and ecological diversity of the Eucalyptus associated with its wide range of habitats

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ("IPCC") Fourth Assessment report released in February 2007 confirms that atmospheric concentrations of the major greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have all increased significantly since pre-industrial times because of human activities. For example, carbon dioxide concentrations have risen by just over one third, namely from 280 parts per million (ppm) circa 1750, to 379 ppm circa 2005. The current concentration is far higher than the natural range of 180-300 ppm over at least the last 650,000 years, as determined from ice core samples.

The Stern Report at Part 3, page 168, *The Economics of Stabilisation*, sets out that the stabilisation targets ought be somewhere in the vicinity of 450 to 550 ppm co_{2e}. Where a stabilisation occurs at around 550 ppm there is a 63 – 99% chance of average temperature increase of 2 degrees C and a maximum of 41% chance of an average temperature increase of 5 degrees C. It is highly likely that the Earth will experience an increase in average surface temperature of at least 2 degrees C. This change in climate regime raises a special concern for forests, where the impacts of increased temperatures will lead to an increased risk of more frequent, intense, and destructive wildfires.

The Climate Action Network Australia, Friends of the Earth Australia, NSW Nature Conservation Council and Greenpeace Australia Pacific (“The Petitioners”) hold concerns that the impact of human induced climate change threatens the features of outstanding universal value of the subject site.

The Eucalyptus forests of the GBMWHa are amongst the most fire-dependant forest ecosystems in the world. Many species of Eucalyptus, banksias and other native flora have become so adapted to fire that they only release their seeds after burning has taken place, the ash compensating for the often nutrient-poor soils. There is usually a high rate of re-growth of Eucalyptus and banksias within the first three years following a major fire. However, a second hot fire, during that stage in the regeneration process, can lead to severe stress and a loss of species diversity by killing plants before they have matured sufficiently to produce seeds resulting in a significant decline in the diversity of the major Eucalyptus species and other flora of the region, a change which would have serious consequences for the World Heritage values and ecosystem integrity of the area.

Further, Increasing temperatures threaten flora and fauna of the very limited wetter, higher altitude parts of the area by forcing species to move up the mountains in response to rising temperatures and by reducing the availability of water. One of the attributes of the GBMWHa relevant to its listing under natural criteria is the variability of the vegetation in response to decreasing temperature across an altitude range from 100m to 1,400m

As a result of climate change caused by humans, the GBMWHa will suffer severe deterioration of its natural beauty and scientific value in the population of the species of outstanding universal value for which the property was established to protect and hence ought be inscribed on the World Heritage in danger list.

As a Party to the World Heritage Convention, Australia has a duty of:

“ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage referred to in Articles 1 and 2 and situated on its territory, belongs primarily to that State. It

will do all it can to this end, to the utmost of its own resources and, where appropriate, with any international assistance and co-operation, in particular, financial, artistic, scientific and technical, which it may be able to obtain”.

Major operations are needed to reduce the amount of climate change that will occur and consequently cause damage to the property. Inherent in the nature of climate change is the need for these operations – namely, the reduction in the emissions of greenhouse gases – to be undertaken by those who contribute most to this critical global problem.

Australia is the world’s largest coal exporter. Despite the warnings about the probabilities of the global effects of climate change, the coal extraction and export industry in Australia, especially, the Hunter Valley in New South Wales, is currently undergoing a massive expansion, which will increase the Australian export capacity of coal significantly. Emissions from fossil fuel including coal are the fastest growing source of global greenhouse pollution.

Further, the Australian Government has not effectively passed legislation to compel a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions but rather has developed largely voluntary policies and programs. In this context, the Petitioners assert that the current legal and regulatory framework in Australia is inadequate and does not provide a foundation upon which Australia is able to meet its international obligations with regard to the protection, conservation and transmission to future generations of World Heritage.

At no level of planning within the current Australian legal framework, is there any obligation, on any party, to take into consideration, the effects of human induced climate change on World Heritage in the context of projects and their associated releases and contributions to the current level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

The World Heritage Committee and the Convention recognize the role of non-governmental organizations and others in the protection, conservation and implementation of projects and the right of private individuals, non-governmental organizations, or other groups drawing the Committee's attention to existing threats to World Heritage Sites.

We submit that the World Heritage Committee must address both the impacts and the causes of the threats to the GBMWHHA as a result of climate change in the context of the matters raised herein. Climate Change is already causing deterioration to World Heritage Sites and it seems highly likely that all State parties to the Convention will be affected by climate change. Any program of corrective measures must call upon those State parties who are directly responsible for the historic, current and projected future emissions to take all necessary steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We draw the Committee's attention to the Petitions provided in relation to the dangers faced by other World Heritage Areas in the context of climate change, namely:

1. Climate Change and the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, The failure of Australia to meet its obligations under the World Heritage Convention and the case for danger-listing Report to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, United Kingdom and Government and United Nations Foundation "World Heritage and Climate Change' Expert Meeting 16 – 17 March 2006;
2. The Petition to the World Heritage Committee requesting inclusion of Sagarmatha National Park in the List of World Heritage In Danger as a result of Climate Change and for Protective Measures and Actions;
3. The Petition to the World Heritage Committee requesting Inclusion of Belize Barrier Reef System in the list of World Heritage in Danger as a Result of Climate Change and for Protective Measures and Actions, November 2004;
4. The Petition to the World Heritage Committee requesting inclusion of the Huascarán National Park in the List of World Heritage In Danger as a result of Climate Change, November 2004; and
5. The Petition to the World Heritage Committee requesting inclusion of the Waterton-Glacier World Heritage Site in the List of World Heritage In Danger as a result of Climate Change, February 2006.

Cooperation is needed now, more than ever, and the Petitioners urge the World Heritage

Committee and the Global Community to work together to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the GBMWhA.

The most appropriate and immediate first response to protect World Heritage in the face of climate change is to inscribe those World Heritage Areas including the GBMWhA which are threatened with serious and specific ascertained and/or potential danger on the in danger list without further delay. Achievable measures and actions, discussed this Petition relate to:

- a. Australia's obligations as a Global Citizen and responsible regional leadership;
- b. Actions within Australia concerning deep cuts in emissions;
- c. Clean energy and energy efficiency;
- d. Transition from Fossil Fuels;
- e. Transport Initiatives;
- f. Land use change and forestry initiatives;
- g. Australia's legal and regulatory framework;
- h. Review and reformulation of Management Plans and Wildfire Risk Management Plans for the GBMWhA;
- i. Greater levels of Monitoring and Reporting Climate Change impacts on the GBMWhA
- j. World Heritage Community Engagement in Mitigation; and
- k. Research Collaboration, Cooperation, and Sharing Best Practices and knowledge; and

I. International Funding from the larger Greenhouse Gas Emitting Countries Required

The Petitioners submit that the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Site faces serious and specific ascertained and potential dangers from climate change requiring its inclusion on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and hereby formally request assistance of the World Heritage Committee, in particular the Petitioners request that the World Heritage Committee:

1. Develop, and adopt, as far as possible, in consultation with the State Party concerned, a program for corrective measures consistent with and reflective of the proposed program of corrective measures referred to herein.
2. Request the Secretariat to ascertain, as far as possible in cooperation with the State Party concerned, the present condition of the property, the dangers to the property and the feasibility of undertaking the corrective measures;
3. Send a mission of qualified observers from the relevant Advisory Bodies or other organizations to visit the property, evaluate the nature and extent of the threats and propose the measures to be taken;
4. Take a decision concerning the inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger;
5. Allocate a specific, significant portion of the World Heritage Fund to financing of possible assistance to the GBMWhA; and
6. Review annually the state of conservation of the property for the purposes of further additional matters set out in paragraph 192 of the Operational Guidelines.