

What does World Heritage mean?

Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. What makes the concept of World Heritage exceptional is that the sites belong to ALL peoples of the world.

World Heritage vs National Heritage

How does a World Heritage site differ from a site of National Heritage? The key lies in the words 'outstanding universal value'. It is the universal quality of World Heritage sites which are expressed in the World Heritage Convention.

The World Heritage Convention

The Convention came into force in 1975 through UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and aims to promote cooperation among nations to protect and conserve natural and cultural heritage of worldwide importance. The Convention is an agreement, which has been signed by over 170 countries to protect World Heritage sites. Without the support of the Convention, some sites of natural or cultural value would deteriorate, or worse, disappear.

World Heritage Committee

The World Heritage Committee meets once a year and consists of representatives from 21 of the countries which are party to the Convention. The committee has the final say on whether a site is accepted for the World Heritage list and also examines the state of conservation of listed sites.

World Heritage Listing

Only the national governments of those countries which have signed the Convention can nominate properties for inscription on the World Heritage list. Whether the site is accepted is a process involving extensive international appraisal, and consideration is ultimately decided by the committee. The nomination and listing processes are demanding and many sites fail the assessment.

Ownership and Control

World Heritage listing does not affect ownership rights, they remain as they were prior to nomination and state and local laws still apply. In Australia, World Heritage sites do not become Commonwealth property, nor does ownership pass to any international body.

Land Uses

The Commonwealth Government has an international obligation to protect and conserve the World Heritage sites, but there is no reason why existing land uses should not continue after listing, provided they do not threaten the values for which the site was nominated.

Management

The Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments signed an agreement in 1997 for the management of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area. Under this agreement, management of the area is to be carried out by the Western Australian State Government, with the Department of Environment and Conservation (formerly CALM), as the lead agency. A ministerial council and two advisory committees were also formed.

For more fact sheets visit www.sharkbay.org.



Stromatolites are one of Shark Bay's universally significant natural features.