

AUSTRALIAN NATURAL HERITAGE CHARTER

STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF PLACES OF NATURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

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Contents

Preamble	2
Purpose	2
Ethos of the Charter	3
How to use the Charter	4

Part A Definitions

Alphabetical reference to the definitions	5
Values	6
Degradation and disturbance	8
Conservation processes	8
Actions	9

Part B Conservation principles

Basis of conservation	10
Conservation policy	11
Removal of elements	11

Part C Conservation processes

Regeneration	12
Restoration	12
Enhancement	12
Reinstatement	13
Preservation	13
Modification	13
Maintenance	13

Part D Conservation practice

Obtaining information about a place	14
Conservation policy	15
Conservation plan	15
Consultation	15
Records	15
Monitoring	15

Background

Development of the Charter	16
Purpose of the Charter	17
Administration and Future Review	17
Address for copies and comments	17

Preamble

IUCN (the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) is now known as the World Conservation Union.

The Australian Natural Heritage Charter was adopted in December 1996 following a two-year period of extensive national consultation. At that time the Australian Committee for IUCN accepted responsibility for the promotion, promulgation, administration and future review of the Charter. The Charter is for use by all Australian organisations and individuals.

PURPOSE

The Charter is not intended to provide a detailed process for describing places for the purpose of listing them on heritage registers.

The purpose of this Charter is to assist everyone with an interest in the significance and conservation of natural heritage to make soundly-based decisions on conservation of that heritage. It is intended to achieve a uniform approach to conservation of places of natural significance in Australia that can be applied to public and privately-owned places, to terrestrial, marine or freshwater areas, and to protected and unprotected areas.

ETHOS OF THE CHARTER

This Charter encompasses a wide interpretation of natural heritage and is based on respect for that heritage. It acknowledges the principles of intergenerational equity, existence value, uncertainty and precaution.

Intergenerational equity means that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.

The **principle of existence** value is that living organisms, earth processes and ecosystems may have value beyond the social, economic or cultural values held by humans.

The **principle of uncertainty** accepts that our knowledge of natural heritage and the processes affecting it is incomplete, and that the full potential significance or value of natural heritage remains unknown because of this uncertain state of knowledge.

The **precautionary principle** is that where there are threats or potential threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

Natural heritage incorporates a spectrum of values, ranging from existence value at one end through to socially-based values at the other. The fundamental concept of natural heritage, which most clearly differentiates it from cultural heritage, is that of dynamic ecological processes, ongoing natural evolution, and the ability of ecosystems to be self-perpetuating. At the cultural end of the spectrum, clear separation of cultural and natural values can be difficult, and more than one layer of values may apply to the same place.

The concept of natural heritage used here recognises the role Indigenous people have played in Australian landscapes for at least 50 000 years and possibly much longer.

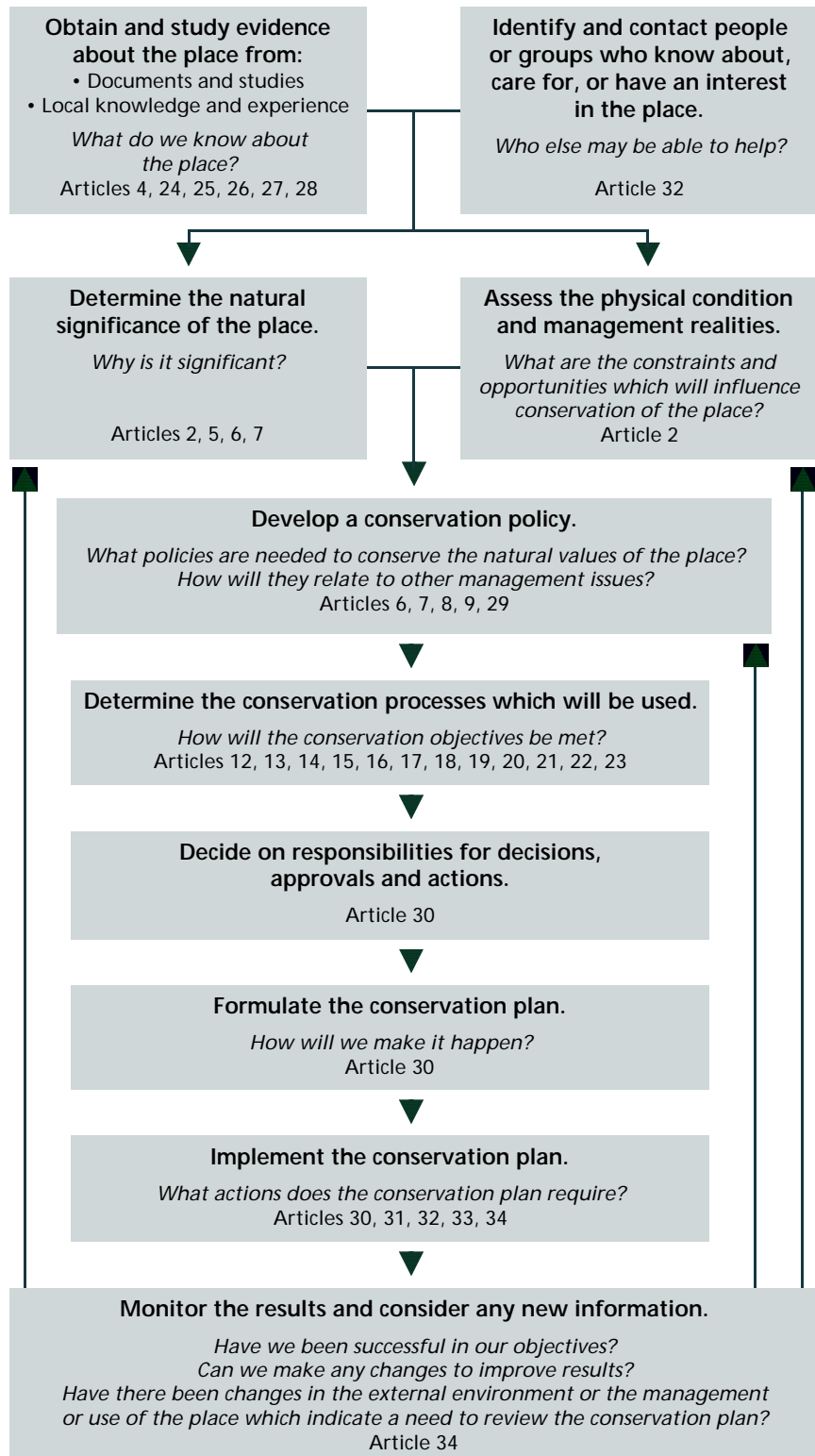
How to use the Australian Natural Heritage Charter

CONSERVATION PRACTICE

The definitions, conservation principles and conservation processes described in Parts A, B and C of the Charter provide the basis for conservation decisions. Part D draws these elements together to describe the procedure for conservation practice.

Important

- The steps need to be taken in this order
- Each step is a discrete stage
- Monitoring is a fundamental element of conservation practice



Definitions



ALPHABETICAL REFERENCE TO THE DEFINITIONS

In this Charter, words for which a definition is provided are printed in italics.

<i>Biological diversity</i>	<i>Habitat</i>	1.13
<i>biodiversity</i>	<i>Indigenous species</i>	1.10
<i>Community</i>	<i>Introduced species</i>	1.11
<i>Community diversity</i>	<i>Maintenance</i>	1.30
<i>Conservation</i>	<i>Modification</i>	1.28
<i>Conservation management</i>	<i>Monitoring</i>	1.32
<i>measures</i>	<i>Natural integrity</i>	1.9
<i>Degradation</i>	<i>Natural significance</i>	1.2
<i>Disturbance</i>	<i>Organism</i>	1.12
<i>Earth processes</i>	<i>Place</i>	1.1
<i>Ecological processes</i>	<i>Preservation</i>	1.27
<i>Ecosystem</i>	<i>Protection</i>	1.29
<i>Ecosystem diversity</i>	<i>Regeneration</i>	1.23
<i>Enhancement</i>	<i>Reinstatement</i>	1.26
<i>Evolutionary processes</i>	<i>Restoration</i>	1.24
<i>Genetic diversity</i>	<i>Species diversity</i>	1.6
<i>Geodiversity</i>	<i>Succession</i>	1.19

Article 1. For the purpose of the Charter the following definitions apply.

GENERAL

1.1 **Place** means a site or area with associated *ecosystems* which are the sum of its *geodiversity**biological diversity* and natural processes.

VALUES

1.3. This definition is essentially the same as that used in 'The National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biodiversity' to which all Australian Governments are signatory.

- 1.2 **Natural significance** means the importance of *ecosystems*, *biological diversity* and *geodiversity* for their existence value, or for present or future generations in terms of their scientific, social, aesthetic and life-support value.
- 1.3 **Biological diversity** (also known as *biodiversity*) means the variety of life forms: the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain, and the *ecosystems* they form. It is usually considered at four levels: *genetic diversity*, *species diversity*, *ecosystem diversity* and *community diversity*.
- 1.4 **Community diversity** means the variety of *communities* in an area.
- 1.5 **Ecosystem diversity** means the variety of *ecosystems* in an area.
- 1.6 **Species diversity** means the variety of species and their relative abundance in an area.
- 1.7 **Genetic diversity** means the variety of genetic information contained in the total genes of individual plants, animals and micro-organisms in an area.
- 1.8 **Geodiversity** means the range of earth features including geological, geomorphological, palaeontological, soil, hydrological and atmospheric features, systems and *earth processes*.
- 1.9 **Natural integrity** means the degree to which a *natural system* retains its condition and natural rate of change in terms of size, *biological diversity*, *geodiversity* and *habitat*.
- 1.10 **Indigenous species** means a species that occurs at a *place* within its historically known natural range and that forms part of the natural *biological diversity* of a *place*.

1.10. Special classes of *indigenous species*, often defined in legislation by terms such as threatened species, vulnerable species, or endangered species, have not been defined in this Charter.

- 1.11 **Introduced species** means a translocated or alien species occurring at a *place* outside its historically known natural range as a result of intentional or accidental dispersal by human activities.
- 1.12 **Organism** means any living being.
- 1.13 **Habitat** means the structural environments where an *organism* lives for all or part of its life.
- 1.14 **Community** means all the living parts of an *ecosystem*.
- 1.15 **Ecosystem** means the dynamic interaction between the complex of *organisms* that make up a *community* with their non-living environment and each other.
- 1.16 **Ecological processes** means all those processes that occur between *organisms* and within and between populations and *communities*, including interactions with the non-living environment, that result in existing *ecosystems* and bring about changes in *ecosystems* over time.
- 1.17 **Earth processes** means the interactions, changes and evolutionary development of *geodiversity* over time.
- 1.18 **Evolutionary processes** means genetically-based processes by which life forms change and develop over generations.
- 1.19 **Succession** means the natural changes over time where one *community* is replaced by another.

1.11. *Introduced species* include those that have been translocated to a place from elsewhere in Australia, and those that are genetically modified.

DEGRADATION AND DISTURBANCE

1.20. A degraded *ecosystem* will usually require human intervention to recover.

1.21. Inclusion of the concept of natural *disturbance* is problematical, but it is necessary because *conservation* decisions are often needed after natural extreme 'catastrophic' events. Human modification of the natural environment often contributes to the 'catastrophic' effects.

The appropriate use of these processes is described in Part C. The term 'rehabilitation' has not been used in this Charter because it is widely used in other land management contexts which are not necessarily connected with natural heritage conservation.

1.22. *Conservation*, may, according to circumstance, include *conservation management measures, regeneration, restoration, enhancement, reinstatement, preservation or modification*, or a combination of more than one of these.

1.23. Assisted *regeneration*, where there is some assistance by human intervention to accelerate the process of recovery, e.g., by removing threatening processes, may be justified under the same principles as those for *restoration*.

1.24 and 1.26. The time frame that would apply to the past state as reference for *restoration* and *reinstatement* is not specified; this should be determined for each situation through the *conservation* policy.

1.20 ***Degradation*** means any decline in the quality of natural resources or the viability of *ecosystems* caused directly or indirectly by human activities.

1.21 ***Disturbance*** means accelerated change caused by human activity, or extreme natural events.

CONSERVATION PROCESSES

1.22 ***Conservation*** means all the processes and actions of looking after a *place* so as to retain its *natural significance* and always includes *protection, maintenance and monitoring*

1.23 ***Regeneration*** means the recovery of *natural integrity* following *disturbance* or *degradation*

1.24 ***Restoration*** means returning existing *habitat* to a known past state or to an approximation of the natural condition by repairing *degradation* by removing *introduced species* by *reinstatement*

- 1.25 **Enhancement** means the introduction to a *place* of additional individuals of one or more *organisms* species or elements of *habitation geodiversity* that naturally exist there.
- 1.26 **Reinstatement** means to introduce to a *place* one or more species or elements of *habitation geodiversity* that are known to have existed there naturally at a previous time but that can no longer be found at that *place*
- 1.27 **Preservation** means maintaining the *biodiversity* and/or an *ecosystem* of a *place* at the existing stage of *succession* or maintaining existing *geodiversity*
- 1.28 **Modification** means altering a *place* to suit proposed uses which are compatible with the *natural significance* of the *place*

ACTIONS

- 1.29 **Protection** means taking care of a *place* by *maintenance* and by managing impacts to ensure that *natural significance* is retained.
- 1.30 **Maintenance** means the continuous protective care of the *biological diversity* and *geodiversity* of a *place* and is to be distinguished from repair. Repair involves *restoration* and *reinstatement*
- 1.31 **Conservation management measures** means the techniques for achieving *conservation* of *biological diversity* and *geodiversity* and may include physical intervention, binding legal agreements, planning instruments, land acquisition and the like.
- 1.32 **Monitoring** means ongoing review, evaluation and assessment to detect changes in condition of the *natural integrity* of a *place* with reference to a baseline condition.

1.32. *Monitoring* is used to allow review of decisions assisted by knowledge of the effects of *conservation* processes and actions.

B

Conservation Principles

BASIS OF CONSERVATION

Article 3. The best *conservation* often involves the least work, and *conservation* should not be undertaken unless adequate resources are available to ensure that the *place* is not left in a disturbed or vulnerable state.

Article 5. *Conservation* of rare, threatened or vulnerable species or declaration of a protected area for specific purposes may conflict with the *conservation* of other aspects of *biological diversity* or *geodiversity* and decisions should be guided by a *conservation* policy based on the *natural significance* of a *place*. See also Article 10.

- Article 2. The aim of *conservation* is to retain the *natural significance* of a *place*
- Article 3. *Conservation* is based on respect for *ecosystem biological diversity* and *geodiversity* and should involve the least possible physical intervention to *ecological processes* and *evolutionary processes* and *earth processes*
- Article 4. *Conservation* should make use of all the disciplines and experience that can contribute to the study and safeguarding of a *place*. Techniques employed should have a firm scientific basis or be supported by relevant experience.
- Article 5. *Conservation* of a *place* should take into consideration all aspects of its *natural significance* without unwarranted emphasis on any one aspect at the expense of others.

CONSERVATION POLICY

- Article 6. The *conservation* policy appropriate to a *place* should first be determined by an understanding of its *natural significance* and should state the desired future condition of the *place*.
- Article 7. A statement of *natural significance* is central to the *conservation* policy and *conservation* strategy for a *place*.
- Article 8. The *conservation* policy should determine uses that are compatible with the *natural significance* of a *place*.
- Article 9. The *conservation* policy should include consideration of *ecological processes* that extend beyond the stated boundaries of a *place*.

REMOVAL OF ELEMENTS

- Article 10. Elements of *geodiversity*, *habitat* elements, *organisms* and species, which contribute to the natural significance of a *place* and its *ecosystem* should not be removed from a *place* unless this is the sole means of ensuring their survival, security or *preservation* and is consistent with the *conservation* policy.
- Article 11. The destruction of elements of *habitat* *geodiversity* which form part of the *natural significance* of a *place* is unacceptable unless it is the sole means of ensuring the security of the wider *ecosystem*.

Article 10. Accepted protocols for scientific collecting should be observed where they exist, and provision for scientific collecting should be incorporated in the *conservation* plan where appropriate. Refer also to Articles 26 and 30.

Article 11. An example is poisoning or draining a water body to eliminate an *introduced species* of fish where the poisoning or draining may threaten downstream areas or the integrity or *evolutionary processes* of the *ecosystem*.

C

Conservation Processes

REGENERATION

Article 12.

- (i) See also the note at Article 1.23 concerning assisted *regeneration*.
- (ii) '*Conservation management measures of a non-physical nature*' may include actions such as placing a protective covenant on a title to land, reserving the *place* as a nature reserve or placing interpretative signs at the *place* about its *natural significance*.

Article 12. *Regeneration* does not include physical intervention, but includes *monitoring* and may include *conservation management measures* of a non-physical nature.

RESTORATION

Articles 13 and 17. In considering *restoration* and *reinstatement*, the length of time that has passed since the existence of the 'earlier state' will influence decisions on *conservation* policy and process and will be a matter of judgement by the practitioner for each *place*.

Article 13. *Restoration* is appropriate only if there is sufficient evidence of an earlier state to guide the *conservation* process and if returning the *ecosystem* to that state reveals the *natural significance* of that *place*.

ENHANCEMENT

Article 14. Examples of *enhancement* include:

- raising the numbers of a species to that needed for a viable self-perpetuating *community*;
- returning an element of *habitat* that has been seriously depleted, e.g., adding gravel material to expand the shallows and riffles of a stream that has been deepened or mined.

Article 15. This means that genotypes different to the local genotype of a species at a *place* should not be introduced to it unless it is necessary for *restoration* or *preservation* of the *natural significance*.

Article 16. This refers to existing natural systems and is not an argument against the creation of new *habitat* following mining etc.

Article 14. *Enhancement* is appropriate only if there is evidence that the introduction of additional *habitat* elements or individuals of a species which exist at that *place* are necessary for, or contribute to, the *conservation* of the *natural significance* of the *place*.

Article 15. Where *organisms* are introduced to a *place* for the purpose of *enhancement* the individuals introduced to the *place* should not alter the natural *species diversity* or *genetic diversity* of the *place* if that would reduce its *natural significance*.

Article 16. *Enhancement* should be limited to a minor part of *biological diversity* or *geodiversity* of a *place* and should not constitute a majority of the *ecosystem* or *habitat* or earth features of the *place*.

REINSTATEMENT

Article 17. *Reinstatement*s appropriate only if there is evidence that the species or *habitat* elements or earth features, which are to be introduced, have existed there naturally at a previous time, and if returning them to the *place* contributes to *restoration* of the *natural significance* of that *place* and if processes threatening to their existence at that *place* have been discontinued.

Article 17. *Reinstatement* is similar in concept, but not the same as, reconstruction of a cultural place.

PRESERVATION

Article 18. *Preservation*s appropriate where the *natural significance* of a *place* is its existing stage of natural *succession* or the existing state of its *geodiversity*

Article 19. *Preservation* should be limited to the minimum intervention, or the change of *maintenance* actions, needed to suspend the natural *earth processes* processes of *succession* and where that intervention or change will not adversely affect surrounding *ecosystems*

Article 18. There may be situations where the *conservation* strategy for protecting *natural significance* is to maintain the *ecosystem* of a *place* at a particular point in its *succession*, e.g., *preservation* may be an appropriate *conservation* process for the locality of the Wollemi pine in New South Wales, thought to be a surviving relic of a previous climatic environment.

MODIFICATION

Article 20. *Modification*s acceptable where the *conservation* of a *place* cannot otherwise be achieved and where *modification* does not substantially detract from its *natural significance* and where the *modification* will not adversely affect surrounding *ecosystems*

Article 21. *Modification* should be limited to that which is essential to a use for the *place* such use being determined in accordance with the *conservation* policy.

Article 22. Records should be kept of those aspects of *natural significance* unavoidably damaged, lost or displaced in the process of *modification* of a *place* to allow their future *reinstatement* to guide future *restoration*.

Article 21. See Articles 6-9.

MAINTENANCE

Article 23. *Maintenance* should be consistent with the *conservation* process(es) adopted for a *place* and should not detract from its *natural significance*.

D

Conservation Practice

OBTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT A PLACE

Article 24.

- (i) The minimum information required before work or other *conservation* action or processes are commenced at a *place* is identification of its *natural significance*.
- (ii) It is important that studies are of as high a quality as possible, and prepared or reviewed by people with appropriate experience, knowledge or professional qualifications.

Article 25. If the *place* appears to have features of cultural heritage significance, reference may also be made to the Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Significance (known as the 'Burra Charter').

Article 26. The study should be designed so as to provide appropriate data.

Article 24. Work or other *conservation* action or processes at a *place* should be preceded by research, and review of the available physical, oral, documentary and other evidence about the existing *biological diversity*, *geodiversity* and *ecosystems*, including evidence from Indigenous people.

Article 25. Evidence of the existing *biological diversity*, *geodiversity* and any other significant features of the *place* (such as cultural heritage) should be recorded before any intervention in the *place*.

Article 26. Study of a *place* may require some intervention to provide the data essential for deciding the *natural significance* of a *place* and the *conservation* policy and strategy. In these cases the intervention should be carried out with minimal impact on the *biological diversity* and *geodiversity* of the *place* and the intervention actions should be recorded.

Article 27. Intervention is justified where it is needed to secure evidence about to be lost or made inaccessible through necessary *conservation* or other unavoidable action.

Article 28. Investigation that requires physical disturbance of a *place* may be permitted if it will create, or add substantially to, a body of knowledge and provided that it is consistent with the *conservation* policy of a *place*.

CONSERVATION POLICY

Article 29. A written statement of the *conservation* policy should be prepared setting out the *natural significance* and the proposed *conservation* procedure together with the justification and supporting evidence.

Article 29. See also Articles 6-9. The statement of *conservation* policy should be of as high a quality as possible, and prepared or reviewed by a person with appropriate experience, knowledge or professional qualifications.

CONSERVATION PLAN

Article 30. A *conservation* plan should be prepared, incorporating the *conservation* policy, stating the *conservation* process(es) that will be used, naming the organisations and/or individuals responsible for policy decisions, stating the *conservation* outcomes that the *conservation* plan is intended to achieve, and outlining the *monitoring* program for the *conservation*

Article 30. The *conservation* plan may be a component of a more broadly-based management plan for a range of land uses for the *place*, e.g., a farm plan, a plan of management for a reserve or a land or vegetation rehabilitation program.

Article 31. Appropriate expert direction and supervision should be maintained at all stages of the work, a log kept of new evidence, and additional decisions recorded as amendments to the *conservation* plan.

CONSULTATION

Article 32. Consultation with individuals or organisations with an interest in the *natural significance* or future use of a *place* is always a desirable component of *conservation* practice.

Article 32. The benefits of consultation include the contribution of additional knowledge or experience concerning a *place*.

RECORDS

Article 33. The records required by Articles in this Part and Article 22 should be placed in a permanent archive and made publicly available unless there is an over-riding indication that this may cause a potential threat to the *natural significance* of the *place*

Article 33. Public knowledge of the *natural significance* of a *place* can cause *degradation* by an increase in visitors or illegal or inappropriate removal of items contributing to *natural significance*.

MONITORING

Article 34. *Monitoring* which allows review of the effectiveness of *conservation* programs and re-examination of the appropriateness of decisions, is a fundamental element of *conservation* practice.

Article 34. *Monitoring* should be designed and conducted so as to identify changes relevant to the *conservation* program.

Background

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARTER

This Charter was developed over a two-year period in consultation with key people and organisations in the nature conservation community around Australia. An initial round of consultation during 1995 resulted in the Interim Australian Natural Heritage Charter (January 1996). A second round of national consultation during 1996 further refined the Interim Charter. The Australian Natural Heritage Charter was adopted in December 1996.

The Charter was developed with funding from the Australian Heritage Commission. A national Steering Committee provided perspectives of the Australian Committee for IUCN (World Conservation Union), the Australian Heritage Commission, the Australian Local Government Association, the Australian Nature Conservation Agency, the Environment Institute of Australia and Indigenous people. Steering Committee members were Pam Eiser, John Heath, Theo Hooy, Mary Lou Morris, Meg Switzer, John Pritchard and Lisa Florian. The project consultant who developed the Charter was Lorraine Cairnes of Fathom Consulting, Sydney.

The Charter relates closely in its general structure and logic to that of the Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance ('Burra Charter')—and can be used in conjunction with the Burra Charter for places which have both natural and cultural values.

PURPOSE OF CHARTER

The purpose of the Charter is to assist everyone with an interest in the significance and conservation of natural heritage in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. It can be applied to public and privately-owned places, to the land of traditional Indigenous owners, to very large or very small areas, to national parks and unprotected areas, to areas of international, national or local significance, and to farms and mining leases. It is for non-government and government organisations, land owners, land managers, decision makers, voluntary groups, professional practitioners and everyone with a role in conservation of Australia's natural heritage.

ADMINISTRATION AND FUTURE REVIEW

This Charter is administered by the Australian Committee for IUCN which promulgates and distributes the Charter, monitors and collates the views of users, and will undertake a review and updating process of the Charter at periods not exceeding five years.

ADDRESS FOR COPIES AND COMMENTS

The address for obtaining copies of the Charter or for submitting comments is:

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All comments received will be considered during the first five-yearly review in 2001.

