



Gondwana World Heritage Advisory Committee (Qld Section) – Communiqué

18 August 2025



The Gondwana World Heritage Advisory Committee (Qld section) acknowledges and respects the strong connections that First Nations peoples have with the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area.

The fifth meeting of the Gondwana World Heritage Advisory Committee (Queensland Section) (the Committee) was held on the Country of Yugambeh people, at Tamborine Mountain Glades, Mt Tamborine, from 21-22 July 2025. The role of the Committee is to provide advice to the State and Commonwealth Government on matters relating to the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage of the Queensland section of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area (hereafter Gondwana Rainforests WHA) from First Nations, scientific and community perspectives. The Committee comprises an independent Chair and 16 members. Apologies were received from five members, four of whom provided proxies.

Invitation to the Minister

The Committee extends an invitation to the Honourable Andrew Powell, Minister for the Environment and Tourism and Minister for Science and Innovation, to attend our November 2025 meeting, which will be held in Brisbane. We are excited by the Government's focus on tourism, protected areas, and the upcoming 2032 Olympics, and would like to strengthen our connection and thereby ability to provide targeted and appropriate advice.

Tourism

The Committee provided a submission to the Destination 2045 consultation and welcomed the focus on nature-based, cultural and regenerative experiences to learn about and protect the environment. We have formed a sub-committee, the Tourism Working Group, which provides for ongoing teamwork between our members and relevant DETSI staff. This Working Group is currently finalising advice with DETSI staff on a priority proposal to better understand visitor demographics, behaviours and needs across the Queensland section of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA and thereby catalyse tourism benefits from the 2032 Olympics.

Activity 1.3.7 in Destination 2045 to "Work with the City of Gold Coast (CoGC) to further advance ecotourism projects on the Gold Coast, under their Nature Based Tourism Program" is particularly relevant to the Gondwana Rainforests WHA. The Committee resolved to provide separate advice to the Minister outlining outstanding opportunities and some risks with the relevant CoGC ecotourism plans.

The Committee appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback, to the QPWS&A on the message framework for the current signage project for Gondwana Rainforests WHA. The feedback reflected the diverse experiences and stakeholder connections of our members.

Values-based Management Framework

The Committee welcomed Committee member Dr Robert Kooyman's presentation on the mapping of attributes that contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA, with a particular emphasis on Paleo-Antarctic Relict Lineages. Aerial Lidar

Scans of eastern Lamington National Park, and the Terrestrial Lidar Scans of existing plots, can be integrated and the data used for multiple management purposes, including monitoring and condition assessment. A pilot of using these data to support delivery of priority objectives using the Value Based Management Framework is underway through collaboration between Dr Kooyman and relevant QPWS&P staff.

Mapping the attributes of OUV will help identify locations in the broader landscape where connectivity is critical for ongoing protection of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA. The Committee is developing advice on a priority proposal to better understand stewardship mechanisms that strengthen connectivity and can be applied in landscapes surrounding the Gondwana Rainforests WHA, thereby protecting the OUV. The Committee welcomed the joint work between the Queensland and Australian Governments on the [Bioregional Planning](#) pilot for southeast Queensland, noting that Gondwana Rainforests WHA is under growing pressure, and looked forward to future updates and consultation opportunities.

Some gaps in the processes of applying the Values-based Management Framework, particularly in field assessments, were highlighted in a presentation by Committee member David Jinks. QPWS&P staff, together with David, are now considering how an induction and training program could address some of these gaps, again highlighting the benefits of collaboration.

Climate Change

The Committee received a briefing from Dr Jess Melbourne-Thomas (CSIRO) about the National Environmental Science Program (NESP) project, in partnership with DETSI, to progress the second stage of a Climate Adaptation Plan for the Gondwana Rainforests WHA. Several members volunteered to participate in the assessment of sensitivity of attributes of OUV. Most of the Committee participated in a workshop during April 2025 to develop a Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI), which will provide a valuable input to the NESP project. The Committee was delighted with the news that four First Nations members/proxies, who made invaluable contributions at the CVI workshop, were sponsored by NESP to attend the national conference *Climate Adaptation 2025*, hosted by the NESP Climate Systems Hub from 23-25 July 2025.

Cultural Values

The Committee was briefed on the outcomes of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA Cultural Values Assessment (CVA), which brought together a wealth of relevant documentation. First Nations members of the Committee welcomed the CVA, while emphasising the need for follow-up with field-based assessments. They noted the value of the First Nations-led approach taken recently by DETSI, and the Gondwana Rainforests WHA Cultural Exchange Workshop, held among the three groups and DETSI staff on Githabul Country in March 2025. As a result of discussions, First Nations members decided to work together on a joint proposal for the upcoming round of Australian Heritage Grants, with the support of a Committee member.

Park Management

The Committee was extremely grateful for the field trip conducted by QPWS&P staff to the Knoll, Zamia Grove, and Cedar Creek Falls sections of Tamborine National Park. The trip highlighted its natural, cultural and economic values and the challenges for managers—very similar to those of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA National Parks. Finding suitable management responses, particularly to the impacts of high visitation, is difficult without appropriate facilities, such as car parks, interpretive centres and sufficient on-ground staff, including First Nations staff. The Committee greatly appreciated the briefing, after the field trip, about the use of Restricted Access Areas (RAA) to protect fragile and unique ecosystems. We resolved to bring several queries to the Ministers' attention:

- The Committee strongly supports the use of RAAs to protect sensitive environments, such as gorges and Eastern Bristle Bird habitat, and the current project of QPWS&P to conduct on-ground surveys to improve knowledge. We are aware that some recreational users are currently seeking access to these gorges for activities such as canyoning. *Will the Minister continue to support the targeted use of RAAs to protect areas of park for their significant and sensitive ecological values?*

- Recruitment, retention and training of on-ground Ranger staff is a persistent challenge, and the absence of Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers exacerbates the problem. *What actions is the Minister taking to improve the recruitment, retention and training of Rangers? What opportunities are there for Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers to work in Gondwana Rainforests WHA?*

Improving the Committee's Performance

Several activities to improve performance of the DETSI Committees were noted and welcomed. Recommendations from governance review delivered by the Advisory Board Centre will strengthen outcomes, including enhancing collaboration between Committee members and staff, and assist to align Committee deliberations and advice to key priorities. A mid-term check-in, led by the Chair and a senior DETSI representative, identified many strengths and several areas for improvement. Members prioritised improvements to ensure that the Committee's advice results in actions and identified collaboration through the Working Groups as a good approach. Stakeholder engagement is also a priority, and the Committee looks forward to adopting its draft Stakeholder Engagement Framework, currently under consideration by the Tourism Working Group, at the next meeting, following consultation with DETSI.

Reporting

The Communiqué is uploaded to the DETSI website once the Minister has responded and provides the information Committee members can use to brief their stakeholder groups. We therefore provide some details about the many valuable updates the Committee received.

From DETSI World Heritage Unit:

- Important outcomes from the World Heritage Committee meeting in Paris from 6-16 July 2025 included:
 - State Party Report on the state of conservation of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia
 - Decision not to inscribe the Reef on the World Heritage in Danger list in recognition of the government's actions to protect the Reef
 - Adoption of K'gari World Heritage Area to remove reference to Fraser Island.
 - The World Heritage listing of the Murujuga Cultural Landscape.
- Summer events led to significant impacts on the Great Barrier Reef including hot water, flood plumes and crown-of-thorn starfish outbreaks with significant coral bleaching.
- The Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan and Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan are both under review and renewal.
- Management of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (Wet Tropics WHA) was supported through the annual [Rainforest Aboriginal People's Regional Forum](#).
- WTMA and partners recently nominated the Highland Rainforest of the Wet Tropics as a Threatened Ecological Community.
- Recovery and reparation activities in the Wet Tropics WHA are currently focusing on response to Tropical Cyclone Jasper and the subsequent Northern Tropical Low, and response to the yellow crazy ant invasion.
- The first stage of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Guides, aiming to be an exemplar of tour guide training, has commenced.

From the QPWS&P:

- Planned current and future burns aim to protect Gondwana Rainforests WHA occurring in Main Range, and adjacent to Springbrook and Lamington National Parks (NPs)
- Funding of \$1.196 million received for pest and weed management at Lamington and Springbrook NPs from Disaster Recovery Funding.

- Significant restoration work completed post Cyclone Alfred and other wind events, including in Lamington, Springbrook and Main Range NPs.
- Reopening of Cunningham's Gap will occur with reduced adjacent car park space.
- Applications have been made for ongoing funding for post-disaster (2023-24 storm events) enhanced restoration and resilience-building activities.
- Management Plans for Main Range, Springbrook, Lamington and Mt Barney NPs are key deliverables for 2025-26, and will include consultation with the Committee.

From DCCEEW:

- Hon Murray Watt MP is the new federal Minister for Environment and Water.
- Minister Watt approved \$5.347 million for 17 projects under Round 7 of the Australian Heritage Grants program, with several projects now underway; Round 8 will open later this year.
- Progress is underway on the IUCN World Heritage reporting, including on Gondwana Rainforests WHA.

From the Chair:

- Meeting occurred with Dr Sarah Gardiner from the proposed [Nex-Gen Visitor Economy CRC](#), an exciting initiative with implications for tourism in Gondwana Rainforests WHA.
- Meetings occurred with the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC) and the AWHAC Climate Working Group, of which she is now Chair.
- The Queensland Minister for Local Government and Water Hon Ann Leahy MP and the Australian Minister for Environment and Water, Hon Murray Watt MP responded to the Committee's emails requesting a halt to water mining at Springbrook and Mount Tamborine. The Ministers advised that the moratorium on drilling bores for commercial purposes in these places continues and new commercial bores are prohibited. A formal review of the Gold Coast water plan is currently underway that will address the issues of groundwater management in these areas. A draft plan is due for release in late 2025.

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to acknowledge the DETSI public servants' the high levels of collaboration, information sharing, secretarial and logistic support, and overall professionalism displayed in supporting this meeting, and intersessional Working Group activities.