

THE IMPLICATIONS OF WORLD HERITAGE LISTING FOR JENOLAN CAVES

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Overview

The State (NSW) and Federal Governments prepared a nomination of the Greater Blue Mountains Area (GBMA) several years ago, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List on 29 November 2000. The GBMA is over one million hectares in size and all lands included within it are public lands (there is no private land involved). This comprises seven National Parks (Wollemi, Yengo, Gardens of Stone, Blue Mountains, Kanangra-Boyd, Nattai, Thirlmere Lakes) as well as Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve. Jenolan is the second-smallest land parcel within the listed area, but it receives the second-highest visitation in the GBMA, after Blue Mountains N.P.

Criteria for the Listing

There are two natural criteria against which the GBMA was inscribed. Areas listed under Criteria (ii) are considered:

outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.

Under Criteria (ii), justification for the inscription of the GBMA focuses on the significant values of eucalypt-dominated ecosystems. Also, primitive species with Gondwanan affinities that have outstanding significance for the evolution of plant life (e.g. the Wollemi pine a 'living fossil') are highlighted. Jenolan, with roughly 20 eucalypt species (none of heritage value), and no Wollemi pine equivalents, is not significant under this criterion.

The second Criteria (iv) used to support the GBMA listing relates to areas that:

contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Again, eucalypt-dominated communities and primitive plants are the focus of the listing for this criterion. However, Jenolan does get a small mention here for high cave invertebrate diversity. Personally I was thrilled that cave invertebrates received a mention, but to be honest, the known diversity of Jenolan (126 species overall, with up to 20 cave-dependent species) is not in itself of global significance, as there are karst areas that have a higher diversity.

There is currently some debate amongst the karst community regarding whether Jenolan should have been placed on the World Heritage list as part of the GBMA. Some are suggesting that a serial nomination of the impounded karsts of Eastern Australia would be a more appropriate platform for listing Jenolan. If such a nomination ever eventuated, I'd probably agree, but for now the important issue is that Jenolan Caves **is part of World Heritage** and must be presented and managed accordingly.

General Management Implications

The Trust is currently conferring with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service as well as Environment Australia to determine the specific management implications of World Heritage listing. At this stage, we are all uncertain about the specific implications, but the following general comments can be made.

- World Heritage listing provides the highest form of protection and conservation management. Developments on lands included within the boundaries of a World Heritage area are subject to three levels of legislation (local, State and Federal).
- Tourism and commercial activities at Jenolan are unlikely to be significantly affected by the listing, provided they comply with State legislation and local government by-laws and are not a threat to World Heritage values.
- There may be spin-offs from the listing in terms of marketing opportunities (i.e. Jenolan as a World Heritage site and international destination).
- Plans of Management must be consistent with Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention and must provide for appropriate monitoring and reporting mechanisms. So it is likely that the Jenolan Plan of Management will need to be updated.
- A Strategic Plan will be developed for the whole of the GBMA to ensure adequate and consistent management to protect World Heritage values.
- Funding to manage and promote the GBMA will eventually become available through grants. Successful grant applications will need to link to World Heritage values. Creative thinking will be needed for Jenolan to be successful in securing grants as the values of the karst are not the focus of the listing.

The GBMA listing may not adequately highlight the particular values of Jenolan, and will not automatically provide significant funding. However, the greater protection afforded by the listing and the increased marketing opportunities should be considered positive outcomes.