

s22

From: s22
Sent: Wednesday, 22 January 2020 3:08 PM
To: s22 ; s22 ; s22 ; s22 ; s22 ; s22 ; s22
Subject: FW: Letter from Mr Oxley to Dr Rössler - update on the bushfire situation in Australia [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Attachments: 20200122 Oxley_Rössler letter bushfire situation update.pdf

FYI

From: s22
Sent: Wednesday, 22 January 2020 1:42 PM
To: Rössler, Mechtild <M.Rössler@unesco.org>
Cc: s47F @unesco.org; Delegation Australia <paris.ausdel-unesco@dfat.gov.au>; Natcom Australia1 <natcom.unesco@dfat.gov.au>; s47F @unesco.org; s47F @unesco.org; s47F @unesco.org; s47F @unesco.org; s47F @iucn.org; s47F @iucn.org; s47F @unesco.org; Stephen Oxley <Stephen.Oxley@environment.gov.au>; Paula Perrett <Paula.Perrett@environment.gov.au>; s22 @environment.gov.au
Subject: Letter from Mr Oxley to Dr Rössler - update on the bushfire situation in Australia [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Dear Dr Rössler,

Please find attached a letter from Mr Stephen Oxley updating you on the bushfire situation in Australia as it relates to a number of World Heritage properties.

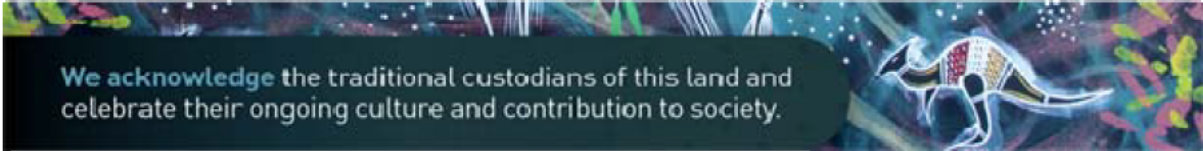
Kind regards,

s22

on behalf of

Australia's World Heritage Focal Point

International Heritage and Whales Section
Marine & International Heritage Branch
Department of the Environment and Energy



We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and celebrate their ongoing culture and contribution to society.



Dr Mechtild Rössler
Director
World Heritage Centre
UNESCO
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
FRANCE

mechtild

Dear ~~Dr~~ Rössler

My purpose in writing to you is to provide an update on the bushfire situation in Australia as it relates to a number of World Heritage properties.

While in the past week we have had some respite in bushfire conditions, with some rain in parts of south eastern Australia and good progress being made in bringing fires under control, the fire situation in parts of Australia remains highly active.

As we have discussed previously, detailed information on impacts is not yet available as authorities must wait until areas are declared safe before making formal assessments of the extent and severity of the fires.

Australian Government bushfire response

The Australian Government has established a National Bushfire Recovery Agency with an initial AU\$2 billion to lead and coordinate a national response to rebuilding communities affected by bushfires across large parts of Australia.

On 13 January 2020, the Australian Government made an initial commitment of AU\$50 million for emergency wildlife and habitat recovery. This will support immediate work to protect wildlife, and work with scientists, ecologists, communities and land managers to plan the longer-term protection and restoration effort.

As part of the package, AU\$25 million will be provided for an emergency intervention fund to help with the immediate survival of affected animals, plants and ecological communities and to control pests and weeds. A panel of experts has been established to advise the Australian Government on actions to be supported through the \$25 million emergency intervention fund. The panel, chaired by Australia's Threatened Species Commissioner, will:

- advise the Australian Government Minister for the Environment on critical interventions required to support the immediate survival of affected animals, plants and ecological communities and to control pests and weeds; and
- assess and map the scale of the impacts of the bushfires on our environment and prioritise recovery efforts, which will inform development of a strategy for recovering populations of native plants and animals and ensuring their resilience into the future.

A further AU\$25 million will be made available to support wildlife rescue, zoos, Natural Resource Management groups, Greening Australia and Conservation Volunteers Australia with on-ground activities. Further details, which will be regularly updated, are available at

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery>.

The Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy is co-ordinating a cross-jurisdictional response across parks and biodiversity agencies, including those with responsibilities for the on-ground management of World Heritage properties.

Impacts of fire on World Heritage properties

Fire is a natural feature of the Australian landscape, but the scale and severity, and in some cases the unseasonably early ignition and persistence of the fires, and their encroachment into unusually dry rainforest areas has resulted in impacts to several World Heritage properties in Australia.

Bushfires have continued to burn in and around the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia (as reported in my letter of 6 December 2019), the Greater Blue Mountains Area and the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. Much smaller bushfires are also burning in the Tasmanian Wilderness and on Fraser Island and there has been a fire in the vicinity of the Old Great North Road (part of the Australian Convict Sites). Some of these fires continue to burn, but at this stage they are mostly contained and under control, subject to continuing favourable weather conditions.

A full assessment of impacts on the World Heritage values of these places will not be possible until the fires are out and it is safe to do on-ground assessments including analyses of actual areas burnt, the severity and variability of fire intensity and impact on areas of high conservation value.

A summary of what is currently known about the extent and impacts of the fires at each of the World Heritage properties is set out below.

Gondwana Rainforests of Australia

The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia is an extensive serial World Heritage property (368,700 hectares) that includes more than 40 separate reserves located in New South Wales and Queensland. Rainforest occurs as discontinuous patches surrounded by fire-prone eucalypt forest and agricultural lands. The rainforest patches range in size from small gully stands to lush forests covering large valleys and ranges. The Gondwana Rainforests include the most extensive areas of subtropical rainforest in the world, large areas of warm temperate rainforest and nearly all of the Antarctic beech cool temperate rainforest.

Fires began burning in the Gondwana Rainforests in early September 2019. As of 13 January 2020, it is estimated that 54 per cent of the World Heritage property has been burnt (197,904 hectares). An assessment of the overall extent of ecological impacts of the fires and the specific impacts on broad vegetation groups, including fire sensitive vegetation, is not yet available.

When the fires are contained, a combination of remote-sensing and on-ground assessment will be used to identify impacts on assets including the World Heritage property. Preliminary indications are that while the fires may have impacted the World Heritage reserves to the extent identified above, it is likely that fire sensitive rainforest has been less impacted than the diverse range of heaths, rocky outcrop communities, forests and woodlands that also occur within the Gondwana Rainforest reserves. In many areas the fire grounds are still off-limits due to roads being blocked by fallen trees, or the access risks posed by dangerous, fire damaged trees. Post fire assessments will not begin until there is safe access to commence work.

Greater Blue Mountains Area

The Greater Blue Mountains Area is an extensive World Heritage property of more than one million hectares with 65 per cent of the property designated as wilderness. The property includes extensive and diverse eucalypt forests and the only known stands of the Wollemi Pine, an ancient relict species with Gondwanan affinities. A number of threatened animals, including the Blue

Mountains water skink, a rare endemic species; and the brush-tailed rock wallaby, are found in the property.

The fires in the Greater Blue Mountains Area started in the north of the property on 26 October 2019 as a result of a dry lightning storm. Approximately 844,224 hectares (81 per cent) has been affected. Fires are still active within the World Heritage property. The New South Wales Government will, as the forests become safe to enter and the smoke clears, begin on-ground assessments guided by satellite and aerial imagery.

The Greater Blue Mountains supports a mixture of forest types – some are readily adapted to fire, such as eucalypt forest. However adjacent forest types, such as rainforest, are highly sensitive to fire. Understanding the impact of the fires on fire sensitive vegetation communities and the species that live within them is a high priority.

Remarkably, the stands of Wollemi Pines have been saved with the use of water-bombing aircraft and large air tankers dropping fire retardant. An irrigation system was also established as the fires approached.

Budj Bim Cultural Landscape

The Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, included on the World Heritage List in 2019, has recently been affected by two separate bushfires. Approximately 800 hectares was burnt in the Muldoons block prior to Christmas and a further 6,400 hectares in the Budj Bim National Park and adjoining Allambie Block since 30 December 2019. Both fires have been contained.

Approximately four kilometres of fencing has been destroyed along with one storage building. Damage to heritage values has not yet been evaluated. As the tangible heritage assets (eel aquaculture) substantially consist of stone and water, they are less susceptible to fire than many structures, but risks from burnt trees and concentration of feral pests (particularly pigs) from surrounding burnt areas have been identified. Remarkably, the fires have exposed new cultural sites that were previously concealed by vegetation. A post-fire cultural heritage survey will be undertaken with input from archaeologists and Indigenous rangers familiar with the property.

Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area was impacted by significant fires in 2016, and again in the 2018-2019 fire season. Fires were ignited by lightning in late December 2018 and mid-January 2019. Approximately 90,000 hectares or 6% of the World Heritage Area was burnt.

The impact of these fires is reported in the 2019 State Party Report on the state of conservation of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area submitted to the World Heritage Centre at the end of 2019.

Four fires have occurred within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area this fire season (2019-2020). All resulted from lightning strikes and all are extinguished except for the Pearce Basin fire near Lake Gordon, which started on 22 December 2019 and has burnt 2,728 hectares (0.17% of the World Heritage property). This fire is under control and expected to remain that way. There has not been any significant loss of fire sensitive vegetation.

Fraser Island

A vegetation fire burning on the southern end of the Fraser Island (K'gari) World Heritage Area started on 20 November 2019. The most recent information is that the fire is within containment lines and is being monitored. It is estimated that nine per cent of the World Heritage Area has been burnt but there has not yet been any assessment of impacts.

Old Great North Road (one of the Australian Convict Sites)

A fire in the vicinity of the Old Great North Road (one of the Australian Convict Sites) started on 29 November 2019 and the Road was used as part of a fire containment line during firefighting in the area. The impact on the site has not yet been assessed by New South Wales Government authorities.

The Department of the Environment and Energy will keep the World Heritage Centre informed when any significant new information about the impact of the bushfires on Australia's World Heritage properties becomes available.

Please feel free to contact s22 [REDACTED], Acting Director, International Heritage and Whales Section, australiaworldheritage@environment.gov.au for further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Oxley
First Assistant Secretary
Heritage, Reef and Marine Division
22 January 2020

s22

From: s47F@unesco.org>
Sent: Friday, 31 January 2020 2:40 AM
To: Delegation of Australia/Délégation de Australie; Australia World Heritage; Australian National Commission for UNESCO
Cc: s47F; s47F; s47F; s47F; s47F; s47F; s47F; UNESCO Apia
Subject: Letter from Dr Rössler to H.E. Ms Anderson - Bushfires (44 COM)
Attachments: 007 Amb Australia - SOCs in Australia.pdf

Dear Colleagues,

Please find attached a letter from Dr Mechtild Rössler to H.E. Ms Megan Anderson, regarding the World Heritage properties “Greater Blue Mountains Area” and “Gondwana Rainforest of Australia” .

Please note that the original of this letter will be sent to the Permanent Delegation via mail; the recipients in copy shall only get the electronic version attached.

With many thanks for your continuous cooperation and support in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention,

Best wishes,
s47F



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World
Heritage
Convention

s47F
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Culture Sector
World Heritage Centre

FOI 200301
Document 2a

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

H. E. Ms Megan Anderson
Ambassador
Permanent Delegate of Australia to
UNESCO
UNESCO House

28 January 2020

Ref.: CLT/WHC/APA/20/007

Subject: **State of Conservation of World Heritage properties in Australia**

Dear Ambassador,

With reference to your authority's letter dated 22 January 2020, I thank you for providing us with an update concerning the state of conservation of World Heritage properties in Australia which have been impacted by the ongoing bushfires. The report has been carefully examined by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies.

As indicated in the report, it is estimated that substantial parts of the two World Heritage properties "Greater Blue Mountain Areas" and "Gondwana Rainforests of Australia" have been burnt, which causes concern for potential threats to the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of these World Heritage properties.

In view of the emerging conservation issues at the World Heritage properties, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies consider that it would be appropriate that the World Heritage Committee examines the state of conservation of the Greater Blue Mountain Areas and the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia respectively at its 44th session to be held in Fuzhou, China, from 29 June to 9 July 2020. In this regard, I would be grateful if your authorities could provide us with updates concerning the state of conservation of the properties, preferably before 20 March 2020.

Thanking you for your continuous collaboration and support in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Mechtild Rössler
Director

cc. Australian National Commission for UNESCO
National Focal Point for World Heritage
IUCN
UNESCO Office in Apia

s22

From: Rössler, Mechtild <M.Rössler@unesco.org>
Sent: Wednesday, 5 February 2020 4:31 AM
To: Stephen Oxley
Cc: s47F ; s47F ; Australia World Heritage; Megan Anderson; Delegation Australia; s47F ; s47F @iucn.org; s47F @iucn.org; s47F ; s22 ; s47F ; Julia Feeney; s22 ; s22 ; s47F ; s47F ; s47F
Subject: RE: Arranging key meetings over the next couple of months [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Dear Stephen,

Many thanks for your message on key work over the next months and our collaboration in this regard.

Let me briefly get back to you point by point:

1. **Updating the climate change policy:** The online consultation launched on 30 December 2019 is now closed, with an unprecedented number of responses. The 2 experts contracted by WHC to work on the updating of the Policy Document will provide us with the first draft of the updated Policy early march 2020. From 7 to 9 April 2020, we will organize a Technical Advisory Group meeting of experts in Paris (UNESCO HQs), as discussed last year. We are currently looking into the logistical arrangements and will send the invitations to experts and States Parties representatives shortly. Following the Advisory Group meeting, the 2 experts will provide us with the final text in May 2020, to be circulated to all States Parties with the 2nd dispatch of working documents foreseen on 2 June 2020.
2. **Meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group:** As you know, part of the mandate of the ad hoc working group was to review the outcomes of the work of the expert drafting group on the nomination process, which is working on changes to be introduced into the OGs in order to operationalize the reform of the nomination process. The drafting group being still at work, no dates are fixed yet for the meetings of the ad-hoc working group. However and as discussed with the Chinese Permanent Delegation, it is intended to hold an inception meeting providing the background of the work achieved so far (especially useful for newcomers) by the end of March, while the first of the meetings dealing with the substance of the second phase of the reform would rather be organized in April 2020. States Parties will be informed in due course of proposed dates for the meetings of the ad hoc working group.
3. **Great Barrier Reef:** We would be pleased to participate in any bilateral dialogue meetings you organize with IUCN. Please inform us as soon as possible on the proposed dates so that we can ensure the availability of key colleagues.
4. **Bushfires:** In view of the emerging conservation issues at the World Heritage sites, the World Heritage Centre and IUCN consider that it would be appropriate that the World Heritage Committee examines the state of conservation of the Greater Blue Mountain Areas and the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia at its 44th session in July 2020. I will also be meeting Ambassador of Australia on Thursday on this matter. We have agreed with IUCN that these sites will be included in the ADD document so we hope we will receive the additional information before the end of March. I am happy to have a teleconference to discuss any further issues.

Kind regards

Mechtild

Dr. Mechtild Rössler

Director

UNESCO World Heritage Centre

From: Stephen Oxley
Sent: dimanche 2 février 2020 23:59
To: Rössler, Mechtild
Cc: s47F ; s47F ; Australia World Heritage ; Megan Anderson ; Delegation Australia ; s47F ; s47F @iucn.org; s47F @iucn.org; s47F ; s22 ; s47F ; Julia Feeney ; s22 ; s22

Subject: Arranging key meetings over the next couple of months [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Dear Mechtild

My purpose in writing is to seek your advice as to intended timing for key work that will unfold over the coming months in the lead-up to the World Heritage Committee meeting.

As you will appreciate, it takes a significant commitment of time and resources for Australia to be able to participate in meetings convened in Paris (and elsewhere across the globe), so we need to be able to plan ahead to maximise the benefit of the travel we undertake.

There are three key areas of focus by the Centre on which we need a clearer picture of next steps/opportunities.

1. The process for updating the 2007 climate policy. In our discussions before Christmas it was indicated that there would be an expert group convened to review a draft of the updated policy. I expressed interest in participating in that workshop and my recollection is that this offer was positively received. It would be very helpful to be updated on the process and timing.
2. Advice regarding the timing of meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group and the matters it will be considering.
3. We also plan to arrange a workshop with IUCN (and presumably a representative of the Centre) to discuss the state of conservation of the Great Barrier Reef. This will be an opportunity for us to address any questions IUCN/the Centre have regarding our State Party Report and supporting documents, as well as providing any further information that is required to complete the assessment.

Given the bushfire situation in Australia and the Centre's advice last week that the Committee will be asked to examine the state of conservation of the Greater Blue Mountains Area and Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, we anticipate that IUCN and the Centre may also want to have discussions on these two properties. As you know, we have been asked to submit updated information on the fires by 20 March.

We are acutely aware that this is a busy time of year in the World Heritage system as SOCs and nominations are finalised, and therefore we wish to make sure our engagement is timely and to the point so that the advisory bodies and Centre have all the information they need from Australia.

May I suggest that in the first instance we convene a teleconference to discuss these issues so we can quickly arrive at common understanding of next steps.

Kind regards

Stephen Oxley

First Assistant Secretary

Heritage, Reef and Marine Division

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Ph: + 61 2 6274 1050

Mob: S22

Mental Health Matters

s22

From: Stephen Oxley
Sent: Wednesday, 19 February 2020 10:13 PM
To: 'Rössler, Mechtild'
Cc: 'Megan Anderson'
Subject: Seeking opportunity for discussion [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Dear Mechtild

I am hoping we may be able to find an opportunity in the next few days for a short conversation on the phone or by Skype to speak about the approach that will be taken this year by the Centre and advisory bodies in relation to identifying those properties for which state of conservation reports will be opened for review.

We are in the process of making time to speak with IUCN about the assessments and are working diligently to meet the desired timeline for submitting updates on the Greater Blue Mountains Area and Gondwana Rainforests of Australia.

Kind regards

Stephen Oxley

First Assistant Secretary
Heritage, Reef and Marine Division
Department of the Environment and Energy
Ph: + 61 2 6274 1050
Mob: s22
Mental Health Matters