



Australian Government

AUSTRALIA'S

National Heritage



Heritage List Criteria and Thresholds

- ▶ **Why have criteria for these lists?**
- ▶ **What are the National Heritage List criteria?**
- ▶ **What are the Commonwealth Heritage List criteria?**
- ▶ **Significance thresholds**
- ▶ **National Heritage List criteria**
- ▶ **Commonwealth Heritage List criteria**

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) establishes the National Heritage List, which includes natural, Indigenous and historic places that are of outstanding heritage value to the nation. The Act also establishes the Commonwealth Heritage List, which comprises natural, Indigenous and historic places on Commonwealth lands and waters or under Australian Government control, and identified by the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources (the Minister) as having Commonwealth Heritage values.

Under the Act, the Australian Heritage Council (the Council) is the Australian Government's expert advisory body on heritage matters. The Council assesses whether places nominated to either list have the appropriate heritage values, and makes recommendations to the Minister on what places should be listed. It is the Minister who makes the final decision on whether to include a place in the National or Commonwealth Heritage Lists.

Why have criteria for these lists?

Criteria, thresholds, and statutory listing are the administrative and process devices we have developed to identify and protect 'places we wish to keep'. They are the primary means by which we articulate the heritage values of such places and, critically, focus our management of these places.

Just as the selection criteria for jobs help employers to look at the qualities people have to qualify for a particular position, heritage criteria help heritage experts to look at the qualities places have to qualify as heritage. Under the heritage system, the National Heritage List and the Commonwealth Heritage List have similar criteria. The key difference is the level or 'threshold' by which they meet one or more criteria. Heritage experts are able to 'test' a place for heritage value against these criteria.

What are the National Heritage List criteria?

The National Heritage List is a list of places with **outstanding** natural, Indigenous or historic heritage value to the nation. The Council assesses if a National Heritage List-nominated place is considered to have heritage value and is required to advise the Minister if the place meets one or more of nine National Heritage List criteria. (See *National Heritage List [criteria](#) at the end of this document*)

What are the Commonwealth Heritage List criteria?

The Commonwealth Heritage List is a list of the natural, cultural and historic heritage places owned or managed by the Commonwealth Government. When the Council assesses whether a Commonwealth place has significant heritage values, they are required to advise the Minister if it meets one or more of the nine Commonwealth Heritage List criteria. (See *Commonwealth Heritage List [criteria](#) at the end of this document*)

Significance thresholds

Assessing a place against criteria for its heritage value may not always be sufficient to determine whether it is worthy of inclusion on a particular heritage list.

The Council is also required to use a second test, by applying a 'significance threshold'. This test helps the Council to judge the level of significance of a place's heritage value by asking 'just how important are these values?'.

To reach the threshold for the National Heritage List, a place must have 'outstanding' heritage value to the nation. This means that it must be important to the nation, that is, to the Australian community as a whole.

Whether a place has 'outstanding' heritage values, can only be considered by comparing the nominated place to other, similar types of places. This allows the Council to determine if one place is 'more' or 'less' significant compared to other similar places, or if it is unique. The degree of significance can also relate to the geographic area, for instance, the extent of a place's significance locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

The threshold for the Commonwealth Heritage List is different to that used for the National Heritage List. To be entered on the Commonwealth List, a place must have 'significant' heritage value.

National Heritage List criteria

The National Heritage criteria for a place are any or all of the following:

- (a) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history;
- (b) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history;
- (c) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history;
- (d) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of:
 - (i) a class of Australia's natural or cultural places; or
 - (ii) a class of Australia's natural or cultural environments;
- (e) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;
- (f) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;
- (g) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- (h) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history;
- (i) the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance as part of Indigenous tradition.

NOTE: the cultural aspect of a criterion means the Indigenous cultural aspect, the non-Indigenous cultural aspect, or both.

Commonwealth Heritage List criteria

The Commonwealth Heritage criteria for a place are any or all of the following:

- (a) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history;
- (b) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's natural or cultural history;
- (c) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history;
- (d) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of:
 - (i) a class of Australia's natural or cultural places; or
 - (ii) a class of Australia's natural or cultural environments;
- (e) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;
- (f) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;
- (g) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- (h) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history;
- (i) the place has significant heritage value because of the place's importance as part of Indigenous tradition.

NOTE: the cultural aspect of a criterion means the Indigenous cultural aspect, the non-Indigenous cultural aspect, or both.

The Register of the National Estate

The Register of the National Estate was frozen from February 2007 as a result of amendments to the EPBC Act. Find out more in the *The Register of the National Estate* fact sheet.

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