



Assessing and Protecting the World's Heritage

NEFA BACKGROUND PAPER

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With the NSW opposition parties threatening to open up the new rainforest parks for logging, the Wran Government moved to cement its 1982 Rainforest Decision by having the new parks given World Heritage Listing. In March 1985 the NSW Government nominated 203,088ha of reserves in north east NSW for inclusion on the World Heritage List as the 'Subtropical and Temperate Rainforests of Eastern Australia', with the nomination accepted in 1986.

In 1992 the Commonwealth and state governments put forward a further nomination for World Heritage Listing that added additional rainforest areas in the state of Queensland to the existing NSW 'Subtropical and Temperate Rainforests of Eastern Australia' sites as the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia (CERRA). The NSW Government at that time refused to consider any additions.

In June 1993 the IUCN's World Heritage Bureau responded, noting that *"There has been a tendency in Australia to take an incremental or phased approach to delimiting boundaries of World Heritage properties"* and suggesting that five areas in NSW and one area in Queensland *'from a value-added viewpoint and to strengthen manageability'* be considered for addition.

In October 1993 the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) proposed to both State and Commonwealth Governments that a significantly expanded system called the Central Great Escarpment Forests of Australia be included in the World Heritage nomination. This

incorporated all the major rainforest areas on public lands in north-east NSW, the whole of 7 major forested wilderness areas linking these rainforests, adjacent patches of oldgrowth eucalypt forests and additional areas of public lands required to link these areas together as far as possible and rationalise boundaries. The seven identified wilderness areas were Washpool, Bindery, Guy Fawkes River, New England, Macleay Gorges, Werrikimbe, and Barrington.

Both the State and Commonwealth governments refused to seriously consider NEFAs proposal. Instead, for NSW the State and Commonwealth governments decided to add to the existing nomination the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park (93,220ha) and 16 generally small and disjunct flora reserves on state forests (totalling 7,837ha) where they also occurred in the missing areas identified by IUCN. In December 1994 IUCN's World Heritage Bureau agreed for the proposed areas to be incorporated into CERRA.

In 1996 the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of New South Wales signed a Scoping Agreement for New South Wales Regional Forest Agreements which committed:

(f) World Heritage values

This assessment will allow the Commonwealth to meet its obligations arising both from it being a State Party to the World Heritage Convention and from its own statutory requirements as set out in the World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983. The output from this assessment will be an assessment of World Heritage values of the forested areas of New South Wales.

The NSW CRA process made no attempt to specifically identify World Heritage values. As an alternative in 1998 the Commonwealth established a 'World Heritage Expert Panel' to identify outstanding universal values in forested areas as part of its Regional Forest Agreement process. As well as rainforest, for north-east NSW the panel identified that *Eucalyptus* dominated vegetation is of World Heritage value as an outstanding example on a continental scale of forest and woodland vegetation dominated by a single genus, noting

- There are two major peaks of eucalypt species richness in the eucalypt forests of the Australian continent – one in the Blue Mountains and the other in north east NSW extending into south-east Queensland.
- All major ecological types of eucalypt forest, except monsoon forest, are well represented in these two areas.
- Two of the eucalypt subgenera, *Monocalyptus* and *Symphyomyrtus*, and the genus *Angophora* are most diverse within these two areas.
- The emphasis should be on inclusion of large natural areas of eucalypt forests.
- CERRA was designed for rainforest representation and does not cover the variety of eucalypt species and forest types in the region.
- To adequately encompass the eucalypt theme, CERRA needs to be expanded to include adjoining areas of National Parks, State Forests and private property.
- Supporting values include representation of passive marginal swells and Aboriginal ceremonial sites.

The UNE Forest Agreement (2.7) signed by the NSW Ministers on 5 March 1999 states: *The rainforest values contained in existing reserves, which have been recognised internationally by being listed as World Heritage Areas, must be protected. These areas are collectively known as Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves, Australia (CERRA).*

As a result of the UNE agreement, substantial new rainforest areas have been added to existing reserves. The Ministers agree to undertake studies in the new dedicated reserve areas, and if they meet World Heritage criteria, to nominate additional areas for World Heritage Listing as extensions to CERRA, by 1 April 2001.*

The Ministers also recognise that the forests of the UNE Region may potentially contain other outstanding universal World Heritage values apart from rainforests. These other potential values may include Eucalypt dominated vegetation and religious beliefs embodied in the landscape (Aboriginal dreaming sites and bora grounds). The Ministers agree to further studies being undertaken in the forests of the dedicated reserve* areas of the UNE Region by 1 April 2002, to investigate and document other potential World Heritage values. If areas are demonstrated to be of outstanding universal significance on the basis of these values, the Ministers* agree to put them to the Government for consideration of their protection and nomination for World Heritage Listing.*

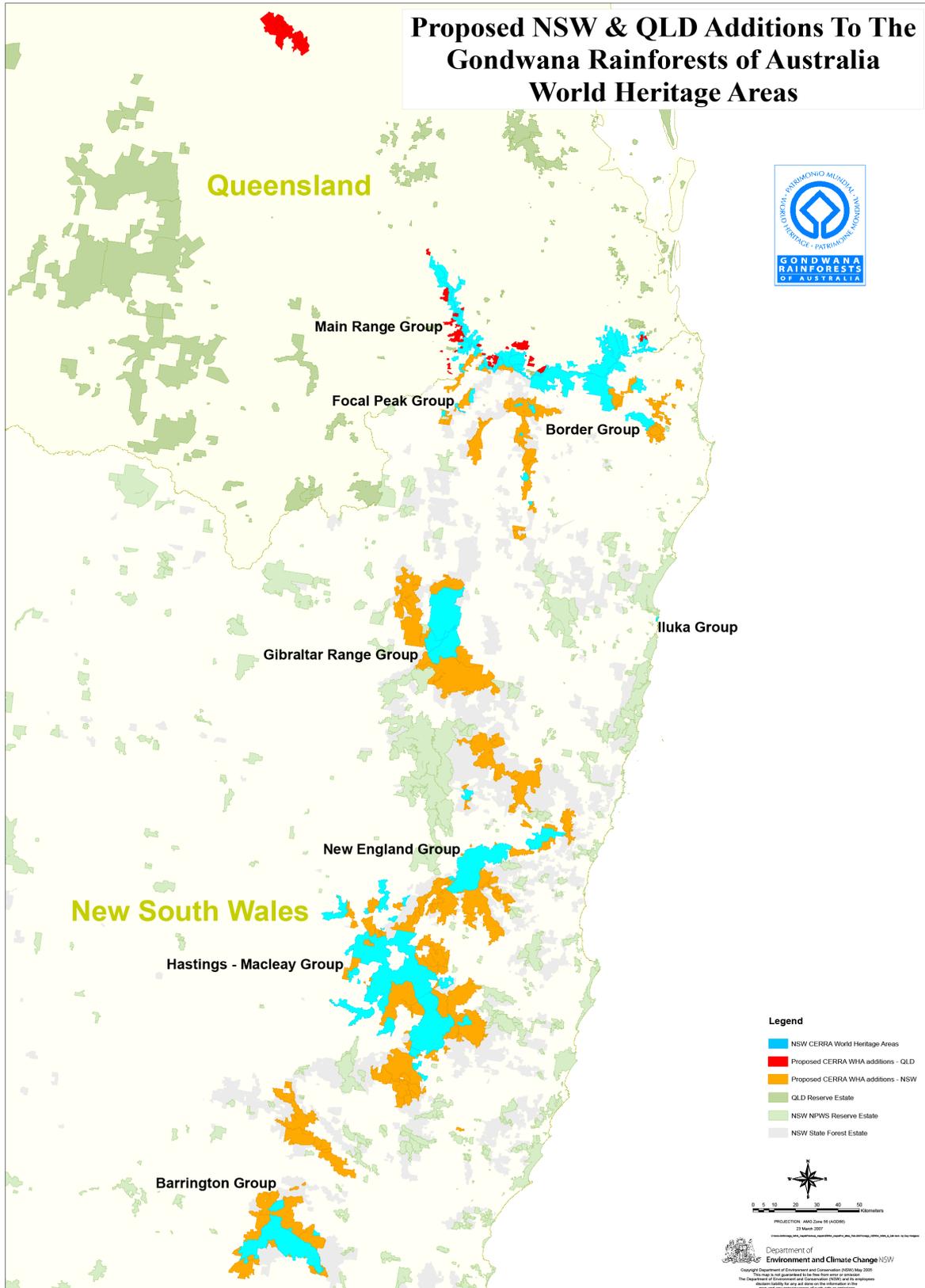
In March 2000 the NSW and Commonwealth governments signed Regional Forest Agreements for north-east NSW which committed them to (clause 27):

Parties agree to actively investigate, and jointly participate in the further World Heritage assessment of the relevant Australia-wide themes specified in Section 3.4.2 (Table 17) of the World Heritage Expert Panel report, including any potential contribution from the Upper North East and Lower North East regions.

Rather than completing the renomination by 2001, DECCW (2010) note that they didn't start until 2003–04 and limited consideration to “*its current rainforest theme*”. For a long-time NSW tried to limit its additions to under 10% so as to avoid having to prepare a renomination. In 2007 the name of the world heritage property was changed to Gondwana Rainforests of Australia.

Belatedly an assessment was undertaken by scientists from both the Office of Environment and Heritage and the Gondwana Rainforests Technical and Scientific Committee (TSAC), with review by the Gondwana Rainforests Community Advisory Committee, that assessed existing reserves for addition to the World Heritage property “*against objective criteria to establish those sites which would both best add to the outstanding universal values of the property and those which would facilitate further protection of these values*” (DECCW 2009). DECCW (2009) note:

The values that may justify inscription are those Gondwana Rainforests values that met the UNESCO criteria for World Heritage listing in 1986 and 1994 as detailed below. These values are represented largely by its biota, in particular, biota that are relictual (dating from earlier stages of Earth's evolutionary history), are endemic to small areas (indicating ongoing evolutionary processes) and are rare or threatened. The areas proposed for addition included those with a high proportion of rainforest, those containing key biota linked to World Heritage values and those which contained rainforest types and values currently not well represented in Gondwana Rainforests.



Proposed additions to the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area

In 2010 NSW, Queensland and the Commonwealth submitted a Tentative List of national parks to the World Heritage Centre which were proposed for future nomination as additions

to the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage area. Most of the NSW qualifying area of 459,739 ha is comprised of areas added as part of the Forest Reform process.

Areas of NSW Reserves Submitted to IUCN as Tentative Additions to the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia.

QUALIFYING CATEGORY	Area
Areas previously recommended by the IUCN to be a part of Gondwana Rainforests	250,491 ha
Areas that formed a contiguous addition to an existing part of Gondwana Rainforests	105,247 ha
Areas that had a high total score against the criteria	104,001 ha
TOTAL area of identified NSW additions	459,739 ha

Unfortunately the Tentative List submitted to IUCN failed to consider additional areas that could qualify for listing as World Heritage based on the eucalypt theme or the supporting values of passive marginal swells and Aboriginal ceremonial sites.

The National Parks Association (Cerese 2012) undertook a preliminary assessment of the World Heritage values of the eucalypt forests in north east NSW , finding:

The significant eucalypt attributes detailed in the report suggest that the northeast NSW region is likely to make a significant contribution to the recognition of the outstanding universal value of the eucalypts in Australia. The ecological diversity apparent in the large numbers of eucalypt dominated communities in the study area; the high level of species diversity and endemism; the wide range in structural forms of eucalypt vegetation present in the region; and the domination of the terrestrial environment across a broad latitudinal range from the coast and across the higher altitudes of the escarpment ranges to the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range, all add considerably to the representation of the World Heritage Eucalypt theme. The unique biogeographic placement of the region within a zone of subtropical/temperate overlap, and the altitudinal range and geologic/edaphic variation across the Study Area, means that this region supports a diversity of eucalypt vegetation mosaics that is possibly unique continent wide. The exceptional wet sclerophyll forests of the region form an integral component of this unique ecological diversity. In addition, the biological diversity attributes detailed in the report, and the dependence of the flora and fauna of the region on the essential habitat requirements provided by the eucalypt biota, suggests that these forests contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity in the region.

Cerese (2012) evaluated the diversity and significance of eucalypt flora and biodiversity in north east NSW (north from Hunter River) finding:

1) Eucalypt species:

- i) Overall species richness - 143
- ii) Number of endemic species - 43
- iii) Number of threatened species - 21
- iv) Number of ROTAP-listed species - 43

2) Forest ecosystems and communities:

- i) Total number of eucalypt ecosystems - 159
- ii) Number of endangered ecological communities (with a eucalypt component) - 11

3) Vertebrate fauna species:

- i) Total number of species - 695
- ii) Number of threatened species - 148

4) Vascular flora species:

- i) Total number of species - 3412
- ii) Number of threatened species - 231
- iii) Number of ROTAP species - 390

Cerese (2012) recommends undertaking an assessment to identify the 'best of the best' of eucalypt vegetation across all tenures in north east NSW, stating:

Given the significant areas of eucalypt forest located within existing Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area (and the proposed additions to this area) as well as the recent fossil evidence confirming the Gondwanan origins of the eucalypts, this report concludes that the most effective and appropriate way to recognise and protect the eucalypt values of the forests of northeast NSW is to include them within a new and revised 'Gondwana/Gondwana Forests World Heritage Area'. It is therefore recommended that all those areas of outstanding eucalypt forest in the subtropical biogeographic region that are identified by a further assessment process are then incorporated into a renomination or additional nomination for this property.

Completing the identification and protection of all forests satisfying World Heritage criteria in north-east NSW is long overdue. The political will to complete the process needs to be first created.

REFERENCES

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