

International Expert Workshop “World Heritage and Climate Change – Towards the update of the *Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties*”

International Academy for Nature Conservation, Isle of Vilm, Germany
16th to 20th October 2017

Summary

The meeting brought together 20 international heritage experts on climate change from 15 countries with the aim of discussing the update of the “[Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties](#)”, adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention in 2007. The group included representatives of the three Advisory Bodies, UNESCO, governments, research institutions and civil society. The meeting was funded by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and organised in cooperation with IUCN, ICOMOS, ICCROM and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

The expert group was tasked to discuss the implementation to date of the 2007 policy document, the potential contents of an updated policy and to provide inputs to the further process. The recommendations of the expert group will feed into the process of updating the policy document, as requested by the World Heritage Committee in 2016 and 2017 (Decision 40 COM 7 and 41 COM 7).

Working methods of the expert workshop

The expert workshop based its work on a set of introductory presentations and plenary discussions on the 2007 policy, its implementation, the current global policy framework, and scientific context of climate change, covering the different stakeholder groups present from both a natural and cultural heritage perspective. These were followed by working groups focusing on four main themes and using the existing policy text as a basis: the groups were (1) science and research, (2) global policy framework on climate change, (3) sustainable development and UNESCO policy framework, and (4) World Heritage processes. The participants discussed in small groups also the characteristics for developing an effective and efficient policy. The group work, followed by joint discussions, led to the elaboration of structured recommendations to update the policy.

Outcomes of the workshop

The expert workshop noted that the impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties have greatly increased in recent years, with climate change now documented as the fastest growing threat facing natural Heritage sites with similar impacts recognized with respect to cultural sites. The workshop also noted that climate risks and impacts are expected to continue increasing in the upcoming years and decades.

The workshop recognised that the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement provide the primary international framework for both mitigation and adaptation by States Parties. While activities under the World Heritage Convention are most effectively focused on site management and adaptation, the workshop also recognised that according to scientific evidence World Heritage

site-based efforts alone are no longer sufficient to preserve some of the world's threatened cultural and natural heritage (e.g. coral reefs).

The results of the workshop include a set of recommendations which should be understood as an early input in a broader process to update the policy and do not reflect any States Parties, Advisory Bodies or Secretariat views. For the purpose of this report, they are structured within five general categories which relate to (i.) the contents, (ii.) structure, and (iii.) implementation of the policy, as well as to (iv.) the further process to update the policy, with some (v.) additional thoughts and questions. Overall, the group identified many useful elements and ideas in the 2007 policy and its accompanying climate change strategy, but agreed on the need for updating the policy based on unfolding impacts of climate change and major policy developments since its adoption.

i. Regarding the content of the policy, the expert group recommended that the policy should:

- Have an updated name because the policy is about more than managing impacts of climate change;
- Build on a set of clear general principles, some of which may be drawn from the relevant UNESCO and World Heritage policies (e.g. UNESCO Strategy for Action on Climate Change, UNESCO Declaration of Ethical Principles in Relation to Climate Change, Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention)
- Be inclusive and universal so as ultimately to be influential to address climate change across all types of heritage in all geographies;
- Clearly address the risks and impacts of climate change on World Heritage, including addressing the unique, global threat of deterioration to or loss of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), integrity and/or authenticity for which properties were inscribed on the World Heritage List;
- Foster climate change vulnerability assessments of sites as part of the nomination process;
- Recognise that the good management of World Heritage includes both addressing the impacts of climate change but also the potential to leverage sites and the values they carry (and heritage in general) to strengthen communities' adaptive capacities and strategies for mitigation and resilience to multiple threats;
- Raise the profile of World Heritage in other conventions and processes (e.g. Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the IPCC) and recognise the potential of World Heritage to speak to and engage broad audiences;
- Recognise the potential for sites to act as living laboratories, platforms for knowledge and research, for monitoring change, linking policy and practice and fostering understanding of climate change and of the need for climate action;
- Be realistic but ambitious, acknowledging the urgency to act and the need to maintain the credibility of the process;
- Follow an integrated approach for nature and culture;
- Be integrated and mainstreamed in all World Heritage processes (climate change as a cross-cutting issue);
- Be aligned with and complement the UNFCCC Paris Agreement and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development to make it relevant for States Parties, and to ensure consistency with national policies and processes;
- Be consistent with the other UNESCO and World Heritage policies;
- Take into account synergies with other relevant international agreements and processes including the Warsaw Mechanism, the Sendai Framework, Habitat 3, the Conventions included under the Biodiversity Liaison Group and the Convention for the safeguarding of Intangible Heritage.

ii. Regarding the structure, the expert group recommended that the policy should:

- Include a set of general principles (see content);
- Include clear overarching purpose, objectives, policy statements, responsibilities and timelines;
- Be accompanied by a reporting/review mechanism with indicators and a technical supporting framework (a strategy and action plan, including a timetable, linked to the objectives and indicators);
- Include a mechanism to periodically update the policy and its strategy/action plan;
- Include a glossary using internationally agreed definitions and putting them into the World Heritage context;
- Be visually appealing with clear pictures, graphs and figures.

iii. Regarding the implementation of the policy, the expert group recommended:

- Using thematic and regional approaches (e.g. regional action plans) as well as pilot sites to undertake vulnerability assessments, and preparing a series of thematic assessments (based on e.g. regions, ecosystem type/typology of sites) to facilitate networking and implementation on the ground;
- Investing in capacity building and training, particularly of those in the frontlines;
- Taking advantage of synergies with other UNESCO conventions, programmes and designations, including the Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO Global Geoparks and UNESCO Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems programme;
- Ensuring partnerships between key players, good communication and sharing of good practices, and considering establishment of a knowledge management platform;
- Focusing on national level implementation;
- Prioritising climate change as a key theme in World Heritage thematic programmes and studies;
- Using the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action to strengthen the link between the heritage community and the UNFCCC.

iv. The expert group recommended that the further process to update the policy should:

- Build on a review of current knowledge and existing practice, including in other relevant conventions;
- Be based on a review of implementation of the 2007 policy by the States Parties with the method to be determined by the World Heritage Committee;
- Be inclusive, participatory, multi-party and multi-disciplinary, which includes civil society followed by a consultation phase;
- Be led by one or more States Parties providing leadership and (ideally) resources to complete the process;
- Clarify the relationship between the climate change policy and the strategy, and that consideration should be given to updating the strategy once the policy is finalized (ideally, the two done together with the strategy taking the form of an implementation/action plan);
- Consider the development of guidance on implementation of the policy and its application;
- Take into account the results of this workshop.

v. The expert group recommended to take into account the following additional ideas and questions in updating the policy and working on World Heritage and climate change:

- Explore the linkages of the climate change policy to the overall policy framework on disaster risk reduction-DRR (the Sendai framework, World Heritage and UNESCO

strategies on DRR), and other relevant processes such as New Urban Agenda and Horizon 2020;

- Explore links to the World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy and ensure that climate change issues are integrated into wider capacity building programmes and activities;
- Explore the possibility of including heritage into the IPCC assessment reports, potentially including an IPCC Special Report or chapter for the IPCC Assessment Report 7;
- Consider the complementarities between the statutory processes of the Convention and thematic assessments like expert reports and IUCN World Heritage Outlook;
- Explore realistic options to review existing scholarship, including peer-reviewed literature;
- Explore ways to involve UNESCO University Chairs, UNESCO Category 2 Centres and other thematic expert groups in implementation;
- Determine whether there is a need for a legal analysis on the overlap between the World Heritage Convention and the processes of the UNFCCC including the Paris Agreement;
- Explore the need to undertake a technical and/or legal review of how the provisions of the World Heritage Convention may be understood today in the light of the fact that climate change is a new systemic-level threat that has emerged since the World Heritage Convention was originally formulated in 1972;
- Consider establishing a climate change vulnerability index for all properties, which could complement the List in Danger;
- Consider including a theme around site-level mitigation action that can help World Heritage sites show climate change leadership;
- In working through the UNESCO regional groups, review the regional differences, such as the EU and other overseas territories, where climate change impacts may be very different to those experienced by the relevant State Party;
- Consider how to address emerging themes, such as loss & damage, climate finance and renewable energy in relation to World Heritage sites;
- Consider one or a series of side events on World Heritage vulnerability and management in a changing climate and on the climate policy during the 2018 World Heritage Committee meeting.

