

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION

IUCN TECHNICAL REVIEW

1. IDENTIFICATION NUMBER AND NAME 147 Kakadu National Park
2. LOCATION: Northern Territory, Australia
3. NOMINATED BY: The Director of National Parks and Wildlife
4. DOCUMENTATION:
 - (i) Nomination form, including maps
 - (ii) Supplementary documentation (IUCN)
 - a) Kakadu National Park Plan of Management, Commonwealth of Australia
 - b) Consultation, Derrick Ovington, Director of National Parks and Wildlife
 - c) Consultation, Dr. Kenton Miller, Chairman, IUCN Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas
 - d) Consultation, Dr. G. Mosley, Australian Conservation Foundation
5. BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

Kakadu National Park comprises 6,144 square kilometres in the Alligator River drainage of Australia's Northern Territory. It is the best example of a complex of ecosystems unique to northern Australia, ranging from tidal flats to floodplains and spectacular sandstone plateaux and escarpments. The fauna is extremely rich (1/3 of Australia's bird species, 1/4 of the fish species, plus secure habitat for endangered species such as estuarine crocodile and hooded parrot). The area is also outstanding in the antiquity and quality of its 1000 archeological sites and Aboriginal culture and art sites (much of the land is owned by Aboriginal Land Trust, leased to the Director of National Parks for 100 years); some Aboriginal groups still live within the National Park.

6. INTEGRITY

Concern has been expressed by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) about the integrity of the area, since important parts of the Alligator Rivers catchment system are outside the boundaries of the proposed site and because the coastal and floodplain environments are not adequately represented. At the 8 March 1981 meeting of the ACF Council, the following resolution was passed: "That the ACF join with other Australian conservation organizations to urge the Commonwealth Government to immediately add the Gimbat and Goodparla pastoral leases to the Kakadu National Park subject to the prior settlement of Aboriginal land rights claims". The Director of National Parks has stated: "I would certainly hope to see the entire catchment boundary of the South Alligator River included within the national park, but this is not to suggest for a moment that the existing nominated area is not viable nor fully worthy of inclusion on the World Heritage List in its present form.... The fact is that the size of the area and its protection under Commonwealth Law ensure

that its integrity can be maintained and its natural and cultural qualities preserved". The Director has been given special powers to enforce environmental requirements through the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory by way of injunction to restrain or compel action as part of the environmental protection in the Alligator Rivers region. The Kakadu National Park is also under continuous, comprehensive scientific monitoring to ensure that environmental change is detected quickly and any necessary remedial action is taken.

7. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

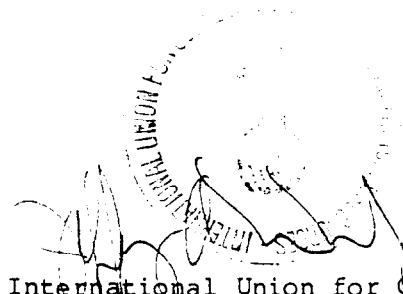
Australia's biota are so divergent that the continent is placed in its own biogeographical realm. Within Australia, as far as IUCN has been able to discover, there is no other site which compares with Kakadu in the combination of faunal and floral wealth, importance of Aboriginal sites, significance of wetlands, and spectacular scenery.

8. EVALUATION

The scientific importance for conservation of the Kakadu National Park is considerable. The cultural dimensions of the Aboriginal peoples and their technology are certainly a vital link in the chain of human development worldwide. Similarly, the natural history of Australia and its relationship to what are now surrounding continents, major islands, and seas makes this a site of particular biological importance.

9. RECOMMENDATION

Kakadu National Park meets both cultural and natural criteria and the nominations should be approved as submitted. The Committee should note the efforts of the Director of National Parks to extend Kakadu National Park, in order to enhance the ecological integrity of the area, and state a willingness to add any such additions to the site should they become available.

A circular stamp of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) is visible. The text around the perimeter of the stamp reads "INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES". Overlaid on the stamp is a handwritten signature in dark ink.

International Union for Conservation of
Nature and Natural Resources

July 1981 (rev)

KAKADU NATIONAL PARK (Australia)

Isolated from the rest of the world until man first arrived some 50,000 years ago, Australia was the home of a separate nature, where mammals had pouches to carry their young; some mammals even laid eggs. Kangaroos 3.5 meters tall bounded across the plains, chased by large sabre-toothed "tigers". Giant flightless birds scratched in the desert for their living, and wombats the size of rhinos roamed the woodlands. The trees often shed their bark instead of their leaves, and great flocks of colourful parrots descended to feed on the grassy savannas.

Into this bizarre world came people migrating from southeast Asia, possibly under pressure from more modern people moving in from the north and west. Their trip through the Indonesian archipelago involved at least 8 sea voyages, including one of at least 87 kilometers; what sort of vessel these ancient people used is unknown, as historical aboriginal cultures had nothing capable of braving the wild seas between Timor and mainland Australia. However they arrived, it is likely that the first Australians made their landfall somewhere around what is today Kakadu National Park.

This area is the best example of a complex of ecosystems unique to northern Australia, providing an indication of how the continent looked to its first settlers. The spectacular scenery ranges from tidal flats to floodplains and majestic sandstone plateaux and escarpments. Comprising 6,144 square kilometers in the Alligator River drainage, it is home to a third of Australia's bird species and a quarter of the continent's fish species; of special interest is a primitive archer fish which is elsewhere known only from the Indonesian portion of New Guinea (an indication of the ancient links between Australia and its northern neighbour). Endangered species such as estuarine crocodile, chestnut-quilled pigeon, and hooded parrot find a secure habitat in Kakadu's rivers and forests, and a recently discovered python appears to be restricted to the stony escarpment country, as does a large gecko lizard.

Kakadu is not only an important habitat for Australian wildlife. It is also a fascinating homeland for Australian aborigines. Over 1,000 archeological and Aboriginal art sites have been identified, among them the site revealing evidence of the earliest human settlement in Australia and the world's oldest edge-ground axe. The art sites concentrated along the Arnhem Land escarpment represent outstanding examples of Aboriginal art. Some art sites feature representation of legendary heroes and were the scenes of regular rituals; other paintings were thought to bestow specific benefits to the groups responsible for their maintenance, such as bringing rain and increasing the supply of plants or animals. A few paintings depict species which are now extinct in Australia, such as the Tasmanian "Wolf" and the New Guinea species of spiny anteater. Several Aboriginal groups still live within the National Park, providing a vital link in the chain of human development worldwide.