

**ASIA / PACIFIC**

**BUDJ BIM CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**

**AUSTRALIA**

## WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN COMMENTS TO ICOMOS

### BUDJ BIM CULTURAL LANDSCAPE (AUSTRALIA)

IUCN considered this cultural landscape property based on a desk review of the nomination and the contributions of four external desk reviewers not associated with the nomination to provide inputs to ICOMOS on the natural components of this property. The external desk reviews were also shared directly with ICOMOS to contribute to their detailed reflections on this nomination. The evaluation of the nomination for the World Heritage Committee will be finalised by ICOMOS.

The nomination is a serial site of three component parts, situated in the south-eastern part of mainland Australia and within the State of Victoria, making up a total of 9,935 ha.

The nomination is extremely well prepared, and clearly outlines the basis for the interaction of people with nature, centred on aquacultural practices of the Gunditjmarra, who have stewarded their country for Kooyang (Short-finned Eel, *Anguilla australis*), through practices documented for more than 6,600 years in the nominated property, but extending back potentially thousands of years further. The aquaculture takes place in natural and modified water systems that follow the Budj Bim lava flow, from an eruption dated to 39,000 years ago. The nomination is prepared in the name of the Gunditjmarra traditional owners, and the Windi Mara Aboriginal Corporation who have worked on the nomination for 15 years. The native title rights of Gunditjmarra were recognised by federal court in 2007.

The nomination documents clearly the natural attributes of the nominated property, and the values that it represents draw on both a geological event (the lava flow) and the biological diversity of the landscape. The nomination terms the area an *eco-cultural landscape*, to reflect that the term “biocultural” is not sufficiently broad to capture the relationship of people and country that is the foundation of the nomination. This, in itself, is an example of the way in which including indigenous peoples in the work of the World Heritage Convention leads towards new and better understandings of how diverse landscape approaches can be recognised and supportive as a basis for potential Outstanding Universal Value.

The nomination is included in areas that are recognised for the conservation of nature at national level. The area largely overlaps with the Budj Bim National Park (formerly Mount Eccles National Park) category II: <https://www.protectedplanet.net/24767>, the central component of Budj Bim Cultural Landscape overlaps with Kurtonitj, category VI: <https://www.protectedplanet.net/555548635> and the southern component of Budj Bim Cultural Landscape largely overlaps with Tyrendarra, category VI: <https://www.protectedplanet.net/357414>.

The Budj Bim Cultural Landscape is wholly within the Country of the Gunditjmarra and is subject to the traditional and customary rights and obligations of the Gunditjmarra Traditional Owners (recognised by the Native Title Act 1993 and Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006).

The nomination makes reference to both nature conservation values, noting that the moderately to highly intact indigenous vegetation of the areas is assessed as of conservation significance, and there are species, such as a bat and some birds that are threatened at national level. The nomination also notes conservation issues, such as those from invasive rabbit, fox, cat, deer and pig, and invasive plants. There is not a complete species list presented in the nomination.

IUCN notes that there appears to be effective protection and management of the property in place, according to the nomination. The content of reviewers’ comments is substantially positive regarding the nomination. Some issues noted that ICOMOS may wish to consider are:

- a) Minor issues with management of kangaroo and koala, and interaction with visitors could be clarified.
- b) Notable recent work has been done by the Ramsar Convention regarding traditional and indigenous knowledge and wetland management, which could be referred to, and might also provide some further comparable sites to consider.
- c) Tourism expectations should be clarified, together with intended management measures.
- d) The quality of the nomination could be taken as an example for other indigenous-led World Heritage efforts, including the degree to which it also represents both a manifestation of indigenous cultural heritage that undermines stereotypes, and represents how the recovery of rights can lead to cultural healing, ownership, and recovery of economic independence.