



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

State Party Report on the state of conservation of the Greater Blue Mountains Area (Australia)

Property ID 917

In response to the World Heritage
Committee decision 44 COM 7B.180

1 December 2022



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

Cover image

View of the Greater Blue Mountains. Credit NPWS.

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country	v
Executive summary	vi
Résumé.....	viii
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Decision of the World Heritage Committee	1
1.2 The Greater Blue Mountains Area (GBMA)	1
1.3 Management of the GBMA.....	1
1.4 Protection of the GBMA.....	2
1.5 Funding	2
1.6 2021 State of the Environment report	3
2 Response to the 2021 Decision of the World Heritage Committee 44 COM7B.180	4
2.1 Update on 2019–2020 bushfires impact and recovery	4
2.2 Proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall	16
2.3 Cumulative assessment of the impacts of mining adjacent to the GBMA	17
2.4 Western Sydney International Airport.....	18
2.5 Strategic Management Framework	18
2.6 Consultation with IUCN.....	19
2.7 Impacts of climate change	19
2.8 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.....	20
3 Other current conservation issues identified by the State Party which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value	22
3.1 Managing the impact of major flood events	22
3.2 Mapping and additional adjacent reserves	22
4 Potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) intended within the property, the buffer zone(s) and/or corridors or other areas, where such developments may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including authenticity and integrity	24
4.1 Quarterly reporting to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre	24
Bibliography.....	25
Appendix A: Decision 44 COM 7B.180 about the Greater Blue Mountains Area adopted by the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou, 2021).....	27
Greater Blue Mountains Area (Australia) (N 917)	27
Appendix B: Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the Greater Blue Mountains Area, adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2013.....	29
Brief synthesis.....	29
Integrity	30

Protection and management requirements.....	30
Appendix C: Species within the Greater Blue Mountains Area funded through the NSW Government Saving our Species Program	32

Maps

Map 1 Greater Blue Mountains Area (GBMA) and adjacent reserves	x
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Case studies

Case Study 1 Platypus.....	6
Case Study 2 Brush-tailed rock-wallaby	10
Case Study 3 Zero Extinction Framework – Brush-tailed rock-wallaby.....	11
Case Study 4 Blue Mountains Koala Project.....	12
Case Study 5 <i>Leionema lachnaeoides</i>	13

Acknowledgement of Country

First Nations peoples have a continuous and deep connection to their Country.

The Greater Blue Mountains Area spans the traditional Country of the Darkinjung, Dharawal, Dharug, Gundungurra, Wanaruah and Wiradjuri First Nations peoples.

For First Nations peoples, the term ‘Country’ takes in everything within the physical, cultural and spiritual landscape – landforms, waters, air, trees, rocks, plants, animals, foods, medicines, minerals, stories and special places. It includes cultural practice, kinship, knowledge, songs, stories and art, as well as spiritual beings, and people: past, present and future.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, while recognising the strength, capacity and resilience of past and present First Nations peoples across the Greater Blue Mountains Area and beyond.

Throughout this report the term First Nations peoples is used to refer specifically to Aboriginal people including Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land of the World Heritage listed Greater Blue Mountains Area. Australia recognises that Aboriginal people may identify themselves at local, state, national and international scale using a diversity of terms. These include but are not limited to: Aboriginal people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, clan groups, tribal groups, language groups, Traditional Owners, Traditional Custodians, First Nations peoples, First peoples, First Nations groups, native title holders and common law holders.

We acknowledge the grief of First Nations peoples in response to the 2019–2020 fires and recognise that the actions we take today impact on the Country of First Nations peoples. We commit to working with First Nations peoples to improve the way we manage our environment and heritage now and in the future.

Executive summary

This report responds to a request from the World Heritage Committee in 2021 (Decision 44 COM 7B.180 at **Appendix A**: Decision 44 COM 7B.180 about the Greater Blue Mountains Area adopted by the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou, 2021)) for a State Party Report on the state of conservation of the Greater Blue Mountains Area to be submitted by 1 December 2022 for consideration by the Committee at its 46th session. This report provides updates to information provided in April and December 2020 on the state of conservation of the Greater Blue Mountains Area (GBMA).

The GBMA, in the state of New South Wales (NSW), is a World Heritage property comprised of eight protected areas consisting of over one million hectares of sandstone plateaux, escarpments and gorges dominated by temperate eucalypt forest. On-ground management of the GBMA is delivered by the NSW State government agency, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), with support from the Australian Government.

Bushfires in the spring and summer of 2019–2020 impacted approximately 739,906 hectares, or 71% of the property. There was a mosaic of fire intensity across the property, which resulted in variable impacts in different areas. These areas, and the species they contain, are expected to recover at different rates. Comprehensive monitoring and recovery actions have been put in place to track the ongoing health and recovery of areas and species impacted by the fires, and to build their resilience.

The protection of species which are vulnerable to extinction is a key priority in maintaining the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property and in prioritising bushfire recovery projects. As a World Heritage property, the GBMA is protected as a ‘matter of national environmental significance’ under Australia’s national environmental law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). In October 2022, the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Water released the *Threatened Species Action Plan 2022–2032* (the Action Plan), which sets out a pathway for recovery of threatened species and threatened ecological communities over the next ten years with ambitious targets, including preventing any new extinctions of plants and animals in Australia. The GBMA is a priority place as part of the Action Plan.

Since the December 2020 state of conservation report, Australia has increased its commitment to action on climate change including strengthened climate ambition through legislated targets as an enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement to reduce Australia’s emissions by 43% on 2005 levels by 2030 and achieve zero net emissions by 2050. Australia’s target setting processes, along with the targets themselves, are enshrined in the *Climate Change Act 2022*. Reducing the impacts of climate change on Australia’s World Heritage properties through adaptation planning and building resilience is a key focus of the Australian Government.

This report includes a description of the property, its management and funding arrangements, and key findings of a recent State of the Environment report relevant to the property (see Section 1). This report provides an outline of the progress made in assessing impacts of the 2019–2020 bushfires, and an update on projects and programs for the maintenance and recovery of biological diversity,

diverse habitats, and First Nations cultural connections to Country that are central to the property's OUV (Decision 44 COM 7B.89 Paragraph 3) (see Section 2.1).

The Warragamba Dam was opened in 1960 prior to World Heritage listing of the GBMA and is located outside the property. The report includes an update on the proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall. At the time of writing this report, no decision in relation to the proposal had been made (see Section 2.2).

The report notes that the residual risk to the OUV of the property as a result of mining in areas adjacent to the property remains low. Mining is in effect prohibited in the GBMA because under the EPBC Act the Minister cannot approve proposals that are inconsistent with Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention (see Section 2.3). The report also includes an outline of the assessment process for the flight path design for the Western Sydney International Airport, noting the assessment will address any potential impacts on the GBMA including its OUV (see Section 2.4). Australia has kept the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) up to date on these assessments and will also provide further information on the process to update the Strategic Plan for the property, scheduled for finalisation in early 2023 (see Sections 2.5 and 2.6).

The Australian and NSW governments' actions to build an understanding of projected changes as a result of climate change and efforts to strengthen climate and disaster management are outlined (see Section 2.7). Lessons learned from the 2019–2020 bushfires in the GBMA (and Gondwana Rainforests of Australia) are available to other States Parties in reports and web links in the Bibliography of this report (see Section 2.8).

Other current conservation issues, including the impacts of recent major flood events, and the creation of additional reserves adjacent to the property (see Section 3), and a description of Australia's process to regularly notify the World Heritage Centre of proposed projects which may impact OUV at Australian World Heritage properties are also included in this report (see Section 4).

Throughout this report, initiatives to involve First Nations peoples in protecting the property are highlighted. The report more broadly demonstrates how the Australian and NSW governments are working to ensure the OUV of the property remains intact and is rigorously maintained with strict systems of protection and management.

Résumé

Ce rapport répond à une demande du Comité du patrimoine mondial, en 2021, (Décision 44 COM 7B.180, en **Annexe A**) de remise, avant le 1^{er} décembre 2022, d'un rapport actualisé sur l'état partie sur l'état de conservation de la région des montagnes Bleues (RMB) pour examen par le Comité à sa 46^e session. Il fait le point sur l'état actuel de conservation du bien par rapport aux informations fournies à son sujet en avril et décembre 2020.

Située dans l'État australien de la Nouvelle-Galles du Sud (NSW), la RMB est un bien du patrimoine mondial qui comprend huit zones protégées couvrant plus d'un million d'hectares de plateaux de grès, d'escarpements et de gorges dominés par des forêts d'eucalyptus tempérées. La National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), une agence gouvernementale de l'État de la Nouvelle-Galles du Sud, est chargée de sa gestion locale, soutenue par le gouvernement fédéral australien.

Les feux de brousse du printemps et de l'été 2019-2020 ont touché près de 739 906 hectares, soit 71 % du bien. Ces incendies étaient nombreux et d'intensité variable sur l'ensemble du bien, et ont eu différentes répercussions selon les zones. Ces zones, ainsi que les espèces y vivant, devraient se rétablir à des rythmes différents. Des mesures globales de surveillance et de récupération ont été mises en place pour assurer un suivi de la santé et de la récupération des zones et des espèces touchées par les feux, et pour renforcer leur résilience.

La protection des espèces vulnérables menacées d'extinction est essentielle au maintien de la valeur universelle exceptionnelle (VUE) du bien et à la priorisation de projets de récupération suite aux feux de brousse. En tant que bien du patrimoine mondial, la RMB est protégée comme étant « d'importance nationale pour l'environnement », en vertu du droit de l'environnement australien, avec la Loi de 1999 sur la protection de l'environnement et la préservation de la biodiversité (*l'Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* ou *l'EPBC Act*). En octobre 2022, la ministre australienne de l'Environnement et de l'Eau a publié un plan d'action pour 2022-2032 pour les espèces menacées, intitulé « *Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032* » (*Plan d'action 2022-2032*). Ce plan présente une voie de récupération pour les espèces et communautés écologiques menacées pour les dix prochaines années avec des objectifs ambitieux, notamment la prévention de toute nouvelle extinction de plantes et d'animaux en Australie. La RMB a une place privilégiée dans ce plan.

Depuis le rapport sur l'état de conservation de décembre 2020, l'Australie a renforcé son engagement dans la lutte contre le changement climatique. Elle a entre autres revu ses ambitions climatiques à la hausse, en établissant des objectifs entérinés dans la loi comme contribution déterminée au niveau national améliorée, en vertu de l'Accord de Paris, afin de réduire ses émissions de 43 % d'ici à 2030, par rapport aux niveaux de 2005 et d'atteindre, d'ici à 2050, l'objectif de neutralité carbone. Ses objectifs et leur processus de définition sont inscrits dans la Loi de 2022 sur le changement climatique (*Climate Change Act 2022*). La réduction des effets du changement climatique sur les biens du patrimoine mondial de l'Australie, qui nécessite une planification de l'adaptation et un renforcement de la résilience, est une priorité absolue du gouvernement australien.

Ce rapport comprend une description du bien, de ses modalités de gestion et de financement, ainsi que les principales constatations d'un récent rapport sur l'état de l'environnement concernant le bien (cf. Section 1). Ce rapport souligne également les avancées réalisées dans l'évaluation des répercussions qu'ont eues les feux de brousse de 2019-2020 et fait le point sur les projets et les programmes de préservation et de récupération de la diversité biologique, des différents habitats et des liens culturels qu'entretiennent les Premières Nations avec le Pays, qui sont au cœur de la VUE du bien (Décision 44 COM 7B.89, paragraphe 3) (cf. Section 2.1).

Le barrage de Warragamba a été mis en service en 1960, avant que la RMB ne soit ajoutée à la liste du patrimoine mondial. Il se trouve en dehors du bien. Ce rapport contient des informations mises à jour sur la proposition d'élever le mur du barrage de Warragamba. Au moment de la rédaction de ce rapport, aucune décision concernant cette proposition n'a été prise (cf. Section 2.2).

Le rapport indique que le risque résiduel sur la VUE du bien du fait d'activités minières dans des zones adjacentes au bien reste faible. Toute activité minière est en réalité interdite au sein de la RMB car en vertu de l'*EPBC Act*, la ministre ne peut pas approuver de propositions allant à l'encontre des obligations de l'Australie inscrites dans la Convention du patrimoine mondial (voir la section 2.3). Le rapport donne également des précisions sur le processus d'évaluation des plans de trajectoires de vols pour l'aéroport international situé dans la région ouest de Sydney (*Western Sydney International Airport*) et indique que l'évaluation tiendra compte des éventuelles répercussions sur la RMB et sur sa VUE (cf. Section 2.4). L'Australie a tenu l'Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature (UICN) informée de ces évaluations et fournira également des informations complémentaires sur le processus d'actualisation du Plan stratégique concernant le bien, qui devrait être terminé au début de l'année 2023 (cf. Sections 2.5 & 2.6).

Le rapport contient des précisions sur les mesures prises par les gouvernements fédéral et de la Nouvelle-Galles du Sud pour bien comprendre les modifications envisagées en raison du changement climatique et sur les efforts déployés pour renforcer la gestion du climat et des catastrophes (cf. Section 2.7). Les leçons tirées des feux de brousse de 2019-2020 ayant touché la RMB (ainsi les forêts humides Gondwana de l'Australie) sont mis à disposition des autres États parties dans des rapports et sites Internet, disponibles dans la Bibliographie du rapport (cf. Section 2.8).

D'autres thématiques de conservation actuelles, comme les répercussions des récentes grandes inondations ainsi que la création de réserves supplémentaires adjacentes au bien (cf. Section 3), et une description du processus de l'Australie pour informer régulièrement le Centre pour le patrimoine mondial des propositions de projets pouvant avoir un impact sur la VUE des biens australiens inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial figurent également dans le rapport (cf. Section 4).

Dans l'ensemble du rapport, les initiatives favorisant la participation des peuples des Premières Nations à la protection du bien sont mises en exergue. Plus largement, le rapport montre comment les gouvernements fédéral et de la Nouvelle-Galles du Sud travaillent pour s'assurer que la VUE du bien reste intacte et soit rigoureusement préservée grâce à des systèmes de protection et de gestion rigoureux.

1 Introduction

1.1 Decision of the World Heritage Committee

This State Party Report, prepared in cooperation with the New South Wales (NSW) Government, responds to the 2021 decision of the World Heritage Committee (see Decision [44 COM 7B.180](#), at **Appendix A**: Decision 44 COM 7B.180 about the Greater Blue Mountains Area adopted by the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou, 2021).

Australia provided a state of conservation update to the World Heritage Centre in April 2020, and a full report in December 2020. These reports were submitted to update the World Heritage Committee on the impacts of the 2019–2020 bushfires in Australia. This report provides further information on the assessment of impacts of these bushfires and recovery projects since the 2020 update and report. It also responds to other requests of the Committee (see Section 2), describes other conservation efforts at the property (see Section 3) and references actions taken with respect to potential development activities that may affect the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of Australia's World Heritage properties (Section 4).

1.2 The Greater Blue Mountains Area (GBMA)

The Greater Blue Mountains Area (GBMA) is located close to Australia's largest city, Sydney, in the state of NSW, and was included on the World Heritage List in 2000 on the basis of criteria (ix) and (x) for its diversity of species and habitats, its Gondwanan relict species and as a centre of diversification for the Australian scleromorphic flora, particularly the genus *Eucalyptus*. The Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, approved retrospectively by the World Heritage Committee in 2013, is at **Appendix B**: Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the Greater Blue Mountains Area, adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2013. The World Heritage property comprises over one million hectares of sandstone plateaux, escarpments and gorges dominated by diverse temperate eucalypt forest (see Map 1) and includes eight protected areas (reserves).

The GBMA is noted for its representation of the evolutionary adaptation and diversification of eucalypt ecosystems and communities of plants and animals in post-Gondwana isolation on the Australian continent. It provides significant representation of biodiversity with 10% of Australia's vascular flora, including 97 eucalypt taxa, as well as significant numbers of rare or threatened species, including endemic and evolutionary relict species such as the Wollemi pine, which have persisted in highly restricted microsites. It is also outstanding for its exceptional expression of the structural and ecological diversity of the eucalypts associated with its wide range of habitats.

The integrity of the GBMA is a key part of its OUV and comprises several elements: boundary integrity, including the size, intactness and site condition, high wilderness quality, and geological structure and geomorphology; water systems; First Nations custodial relationships, connection to Country, and rock art and occupation sites; and the property's natural beauty.

1.3 Management of the GBMA

On-ground management of the GBMA is delivered by the NSW State government agency, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), with support from the Australian Government. Strategic

management of the World Heritage property is guided by the *Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Strategic Plan 2009* (NSW NPWS 2009). Its purpose is to bring coherence to the overall management of the property. Refer to Section 2.5 for further details on the Strategic Plan.

NPWS is committed to working in collaboration with local First Nations groups to jointly manage NSW national parks and reserves in NSW, including reserves in the GBMA. The 2014 Gundungurra Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) establishes joint management between the Gundungurra people and the NSW Government for part of the GBMA.

1.4 Protection of the GBMA

Australia's national environmental law, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) provides an overarching level of protection for the OUV of the GBMA. Under the EPBC Act, World Heritage values (Outstanding Universal Value) are one of the protected 'matters of national environmental significance'. Where an action is proposed to be undertaken within, or outside, a World Heritage property that is likely to have a significant impact, the EPBC Act ensures that steps are taken to ensure World Heritage values are protected. Environmental impact assessments and decisions may also be required under state regulatory requirements.

The EPBC Act process allows the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Water to grant or refuse approval to take an action, and to impose conditions on the taking of an action. Under the EPBC Act, the Minister cannot approve a proposal that would be inconsistent with Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention. The EPBC Act imposes substantial civil and criminal penalties on a person who takes an unlawful action.

The recovery of threatened species and ecological communities nationally listed under the EPBC Act is guided by conservation advice. For some threatened species and ecological communities with more complex planning needs the Minister can make or adopt and implement recovery plans. These plans apply to some species that contribute to the OUV of the property and aim to maximise their long-term survival in the wild. Preparation of recovery plans includes consultation with environment ministers in the relevant jurisdictions, the Australian Government Threatened Species Scientific Committee (an independent committee comprising scientific experts), and the public.

There are also eight NSW legislative instruments that protect and conserve the GBMA. Collectively these legal instruments ensure that the Australian and NSW governments can take necessary action to protect the property's OUV. Such actions include for example, developing and implementing plans of management, regulating development within and near the World Heritage property and controlling feral animals and weeds.

1.5 Funding

Management of the GBMA is funded by the NSW Government with additional funding provided by the Australian Government for governance and specific projects. NSW provides an estimated annual budget of over A\$12 million in core funding for management, maintenance and presentation, and support for governance arrangements for the GBMA. This is an approximate figure only, noting that there are many shared NPWS costs which cannot be accurately allocated to individual areas.

In addition to annual funding to support governance arrangements, the Australian Government provides one-off grants for specific purposes, for example the Australian Heritage Grants Program

and the Regional Land Partnerships Program, a grant to support recovery from the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Examples of bushfire recovery for the GBMA, funded under the Australian Government's A\$200 million Bushfire Wildlife and Habitat Recovery Package for projects across south-eastern Australia, are included in Section 2.1.

1.6 2021 State of the Environment report

Every five years the Australian Government publishes [a report on the State of the Environment](#). The most recent report was released on 19 July 2022. The report combines scientific, traditional, and local knowledge to provide a rigorous, peer-reviewed assessment of every aspect of the environment of Australia. The purpose of the report is to document the current condition of the environment.

Some key findings of the report relevant to the GBMA include:

- bushfires are likely to be of higher intensity due to climate change, and bushfire season is likely to start earlier, and last longer. This is reducing time in between fire seasons to undertake hazard reduction efforts and may also impact fire-fighting resource sharing with the Northern Hemisphere, which has previously provided assistance during intense bushfire seasons in Australia such as in 2019–2020.
- fire weather is projected to worsen as measured by several indices.

The overall conclusion of the report is that:

- further changes to climate and the environment are inevitable so adaptation will be essential
- climate change is already having, and will continue to have, an impact on natural heritage places in Australia
- global climate action will be required to protect heritage in Australia.

1.6.1 Threatened Species Action Plan 2022–2032

The 2021 State of the Environment Report highlighted the need for action to protect our plants, animals and ecosystems. In October 2022, the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Water released the [Threatened Species Action Plan 2022–2032](#) (the Action Plan). The Action Plan sets out a pathway for recovery of threatened species and threatened ecological communities over the next ten years with ambitious targets, including preventing any new extinctions of plants and animals in Australia.

There are 110 species that are prioritised in the Action Plan, some of which occur in the GBMA, for example the regent honeyeater and the brush-tailed rock-wallaby, and the GBMA itself is one of the 20 priority places in the Plan.

2 Response to the 2021 Decision of the World Heritage Committee 44 COM7B.180

The Committee requested an update on the assessment of impacts of the 2019–2020 bushfires on the OUV of the property and its recovery prospects and made specific requests in relation to the assessment processes for the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall, the cumulative impacts of mining in the vicinity of the property, air space and flight path design for the Western Sydney International Airport and the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Strategic Plan. The full text of the 2021 World Heritage Committee decision is at **Appendix A: Decision 44 COM 7B.180** about the Greater Blue Mountains Area adopted by the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou, 2021).

Relevant paragraphs from the decision are quoted in this report, and Australia's State Party response is provided for each.

2.1 Update on 2019–2020 bushfires impact and recovery

Decision 44 COM 7B.180 Paragraphs 3 and 4:

3) Expresses its utmost concern about the unprecedented fires that affected large parts of the property and significantly impacted some areas and habitats, and commends the State Party for its immediate fire-fighting responses, including those targeting specific attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, such as the Wollemi pine stands;

4) Welcomes the information provided by the State Party regarding the immediate management responses to the 2019–2020 bushfires, including the assessment of direct and indirect impacts, plans for longer-term actions and the consideration of funding commitments to ensure long-term recovery, and requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, an update on the process of assessing the impacts of fires on the OUV of the property and its recovery prospects, as soon as this significant information has been collated;

State Party's response

2.1.1 Overview

Bushfires in the spring and summer of 2019–2020 impacted approximately 739,906 hectares, or 71%, of the World Heritage property. There was a mosaic of fire intensity and impact across the property as reported to the World Heritage Centre in April and December 2020.

Some plant communities and species, such as the many species of Eucalypts whose diversity is a key attribute of the OUV of the property, have special fire-adaptive traits, including re-sprouting after fires. Other species and habitats, such as the Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*), are highly restricted and more sensitive to the impacts of fire. This means that parts of the GBMA and species will recover at different rates. As described in Sections 2.1.2 to 2.1.9, a comprehensive suite of monitoring and recovery actions have been put in place to track the ongoing health and recovery of areas and

species impacted by the 2019–2020 fires and build their resilience. Significant rain and flooding in Eastern Australia in 2022, as reported in Section 3.1, have delayed some bushfire impact assessment and recovery actions, such as pest and weed control activities.

The NSW Government is conducting extensive monitoring of habitats and species and early indications are that species recovery is varied. For example:

- The platypus is being monitored using environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling with 40% of sites monitored testing positive to the presence of platypus (see **Case Study 1**).
- Some marsupial species, such as the brush-tailed rock-wallaby, have been observed to be adapting to post-fire habitats and food sources (see **Case Study 2 and Case Study 3**).
- During the 2019–2020 bushfires, 75%–100% of mapped koala habitats across five study sites in the GBMA were impacted. There is some evidence that the home range of koalas has increased after the fires as they need to travel further to find good quality food trees (see **Case Study 4**).
- There are some plant species in the GBMA which are fire-dependant and require fire to trigger plant germination. Plant species such as *Leionema lachnaeoides* have been observed to be sprouting new populations from seeds in burned landscapes (see **Case Study 5**).

2.1.2 Assessment of the impacts of the 2019–2020 bushfires

The NSW Government is continuing to assess the impact of the fires on the property. The Fire Extent and Severity Mapping (FESM) outlined in the 2020 State Party reports was updated on 16 December 2020 to better measure the extent and severity of the bushfires (DPE 2021).

Research has identified 200 plant and animal species that have been impacted by the bushfires. These include the platypus, brush-tailed rock-wallaby and the plant species *Leionema lachnaeoides*, which are referenced in **Case Study 1**, **Case Study 2** and **Case Study 5** respectively. The long-term direct and indirect impacts of the bushfires on these species is the subject of ongoing assessments. The recovery monitoring projects outlined in **Case Study 2**, **Case Study 4** and **Case Study 5** seek to maintain the diversity of species in the GBMA and their contribution to the OUV of the property. These projects directly link the impact assessments of the 2019–2020 bushfires to recovery actions.

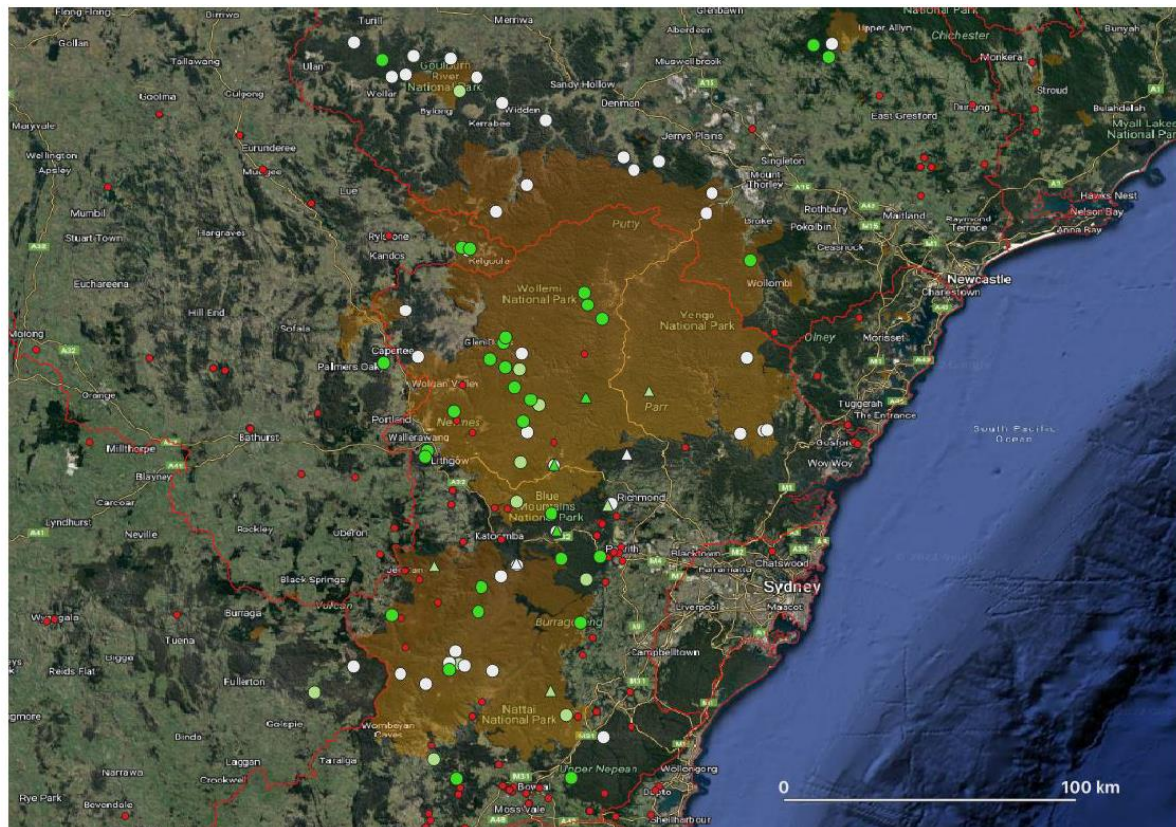
Case Study 1 Platypus

Platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*)

The platypus is an iconic Australian species found in the GBMA that is notoriously difficult to monitor. This charismatic and evolutionarily distinct species is an important part of the OUV of the property. While not listed as threatened under the EPBC Act, studies are underway to determine its status following the 2019–2020 bushfires and the extended period of drought leading up to the bushfires.

In the Australian spring of 2021, innovative environmental DNA sampling was undertaken in 67 streams in and adjacent to the GBMA to build a post fire census of platypus. Platypus eDNA was positively detected at 30 of the 78 sites with a further ten returning an equivocal result. Of the 11 sites previously sampled by NSW DPE, six returned a positive result for platypus eDNA and a further three sites returned an equivocal result. In total, 40% of sites tested positive for platypus eDNA, with another 15% equivocal.

Data from this snapshot will be used to help fill some gaps in surveys of platypus, build a picture of platypus status and response to disturbance across the broader landscape, inform targeted weed management and erosion control, and help inform focused research into this iconic species.



Results for eDNA screening for platypus (green = positive, pale green = equivocal, grey = negative) during the Australian Spring 2021 and Autumn 2022 (triangles existing samples). Orange shading indicates areas affected by the 2019–2020 bushfires. Small red markers indicate (<5yrs pre-fire) platypus records from Atlas of Living Australian and BioNet (Griffiths *et al*, 2022).



Platypus from the Jenolan River walking track. Credit Jenolan Caves Trust DPE.

2.1.3 Recovery efforts

The GBMA is a centre of diversification for the Australian scleromorphic flora, particularly eucalypts, and is valued for its outstanding diversity of flora and fauna and their habitats. It is home to 10% of Australia's vascular flora, including more than 97 eucalypt taxa and significant numbers of rare or threatened species, including endemic and evolutionary relict species such as the Wollemi pine and Blue Mountains pine. The Wollemi pine habitat was declared the first Asset of Intergenerational Significance (AIS) in NSW, which sets out priority actions to protect the asset. The AIS program is further detailed in Section 2.1.9. Species vulnerable to extinction are central to the OUV of the property. Protection of these species is a key priority in managing the property and is a major focus of bushfire recovery work.

The Australian and NSW governments are together investing over A\$30m to support bushfire recovery efforts in NSW and to improve fire management knowledge and capability. Funding is supporting projects in and around the GBMA to support maintenance of OUV.

Projects include targeted feral animal and weed control, upgrades to fire trails, erosion control, First Nations-led healing of Country and threatened species conservation activities benefiting species such as the regent honeyeater (*Anthochaera phrygia*), Blue Mountains perch (*Macquaria* sp. nov.), purple copper butterfly (*Paralucia spinifera*), Blue Mountains water skink (*Eulamprus leuraensis*) and Deans boronia (*Boronia deanei*). During the initial bushfire response, several projects were provided with emergency funding to support reconnaissance of species endemic to the broader Blue Mountains area post-fire, including surveying for the purple copper butterfly, reptiles such as the broad-tailed gecko (*Phyllurus platurus*) and endangered land snails. Results of these surveys are being used to inform species listings and management practices.

Additionally, land managers, universities and Natural Resource Management organisations have conducted pest control adjacent to the GBMA in order to minimise impacts and to benefit the area with improved fire management practices and restoration activities.

2.1.4 First Nations partnerships in bushfire recovery

The Australian and NSW governments recognise that First Nations communities are custodians of their culture and Country, and the importance of working with First Nations communities to manage World Heritage properties. First Nations peoples' use of culturally managed fire is important to enhance and protect natural and cultural heritage; to express and maintain culture, kinship and

identity; and to continue to share knowledge and practice. Supporting this work contributes to maintaining First Nations peoples' custodial relationship with the area that is a key component of the integrity of the OUV of the property.

Funding to First Nations peoples is enabling them to build capacity to perform pest and weed management, cultural burning, cultural site surveying and recording. Aboriginal Identified Field Officers have been employed to work in the GBMA, and community groups are working with government on post-fire conservation priorities within the property.

In late 2020, for example, Gundungurra Traditional Custodians visited cultural heritage sites in the southern part of the property to conduct an inventory of the impacts of the bushfires on known archaeological sites and to further understand the requirements of Aboriginal sites in relation to fire. The results of investigations revealed varying degrees of impact to a range of sites including rock shelters, rock platforms and a dreamtime waterhole.

Investigations are ongoing and interim recommendations are to continue impact assessments, ongoing site protection works for known Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and ongoing First Nations community engagement in the development of wildfire and prescribed burn plans.



Shelter post 2019–2020 bushfires, Southern Blue Mountains National Park. Credit M. Jackson.

2.1.5 Recovery of threatened species

The OUV of the GBMA includes representative examples, in a relatively small area, of the evolution and adaptation of the genus *Eucalyptus* and eucalypt-dominated vegetation on the Australian

continent. These examples contribute, along with other plant families, to the globally significant plant species and ecosystem diversity of the property, which provides habitat for a diverse suite of vertebrate and invertebrate fauna. The diverse fauna and flora, for which the property was World Heritage listed, were impacted by the 2019–2020 bushfires, and recovery efforts are focussed on these species.

Listed threatened species and ecological communities are protected under the EPBC Act, affording additional legislative protection to the ancient, relict and diverse species of the GBMA. The brush-tailed rock-wallaby and the plant species *Leionema lachnaeoides* are species that contribute to the OUV of the GBMA (see **Case Study 2** and **Case Study 5**).

NSW Saving our Species program

The NSW Government's threatened species conservation program, Saving our Species, has invested A\$175 million over 10 years (2016–26). The program includes the development of strategies for each threatened species and ecological community, establishment of a framework for setting priorities and a process for monitoring and reporting on the overall outcomes of the program. A list of the species from across the GBMA that have benefitted from Saving our Species funding is at **Appendix C: Species within the Greater Blue Mountains Area funded through the NSW Government Saving our Species Program**. Species included in the Australian Government's list of 100 priority species selected to help focus efforts on threatened species recovery actions are also noted.

The Saving our Species program has contributed to the assessment of the impacts of fires on threatened species and threatened ecological communities that contribute to the OUV of the GBMA.

Zero extinction framework

In NSW, about 85% of all species threatened with extinction are represented on the national park estate, including in the GBMA. Most are endemic to Australia or NSW. The future for these approximately 800 species is threatened by feral animals, weeds, altered fire regimes, the impact of climate change and other threats. The NSW Government has committed to zero extinctions on the NSW national park estate (baseline: July 2020) and stabilising or improving the on-park trajectory of all threatened species by 30 June 2030 with an interim target to stabilise or improve the trajectory of 300 species by 30 June 2026. Conservation action includes significant predator and weed control programs as seen in **Case Study 3**, and targeted habitat protection and management including through the Saving our Species program and Assets of Intergenerational Significance.

2.1.6 Threatened species case studies

Case Study 2 Brush-tailed rock-wallaby

Brush-tailed rock-wallaby *Petrogale penicillata*

Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve

At the Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve sites, the 2019–2020 bushfires intensely burned the entire area of brush-tailed rock-wallaby occupancy and early post-fire monitoring results indicated a significant decline in the population.

Vegetation structure has changed from open grassy woodland with a sparse shrub layer, to a structure with an almost impenetrable weedy shrub layer in many locations throughout the colony, which has reduced foraging ability and restricts the movement of rock-wallabies. There is, however, an abundance of alternative plant food available for rock-wallabies.

A minimum of 102 individuals were detected in May 2021. The 2022 monitoring results are encouraging and indicate higher than expected survival. Several animals that were frequent trap occupants prior to the fire have not been captured since but appear to have been replaced by a number of individuals never captured before. These may have moved into the core areas from more marginal habitat.

Wollemi National Park

At Wolgan and Capertee Valleys in Wollemi National Park ongoing camera monitoring has not indicated any significant population declines, with some populations even recording higher densities than their pre-fire estimates. Post-fire population surveys estimate a total of 175 rock-wallabies across seven colonies, including 86 females of which 52 (60%) were observed with pouch young.

Intensive aerial and ground baiting programs for foxes over a number of years have helped lower predation pressure on the brush-tailed rock-wallaby and other native species.



Field camera during 2019–2020 bushfire in the Wollemi National Park. Note presence of wallaby in the area five days later. Credit NPWS.

Case Study 3 Zero Extinction Framework – Brush-tailed rock-wallaby

Brush-tailed rock wallaby – feral predator free area

One of the actions of the NPWS zero extinction framework is the development of a feral predator free area to support population growth of the brush-tailed rock-wallaby. The Nattai National Park in the southeast of the GBMA provides habitat for a small, isolated colony of endangered brush-tailed rock-wallabies. The local population, important for maintaining genetic diversity, has been declining due to feral fox and cat predation and was likely to become locally extinct without intervention.

The NSW Government is investing A\$750,000 to construct and manage a 92-hectare feral predator free area. The project involves working closely with threatened species specialists to recover this population in the wild and through captive breeding, installing 4.4 kilometres of predator proof fencing, 1.7 kilometres of perimeter trail, water stations, soft release area and extensive pest control.



Predator free fencing at Nattai National Park and release of brush-tailed rock wallaby. Credit NPWS.

2.1.7 Koala conservation

The koala *Phascolarctos cinereus* is an iconic Australian marsupial of cultural and emotional significance to both First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. The koala is also of global biodiversity significance as the only surviving member of the ancient line of the marsupial family Phascolarctidae. **Case Study 4** details efforts to protect the koala population in the GBMA.

Case Study 4 Blue Mountains Koala Project

Blue Mountains Koala Project

Since 2014, Science for Wildlife, a not-for-profit wildlife conservation organisation based in the Blue Mountains, has been mapping koala distribution, understanding ecology and threats, and assessing genomics and disease across five study sites in the GBMA. Their work has identified that the GBMA koalas are the most genetically diverse koalas in Australia, making them particularly important for conservation of the species.

Once koala populations are found and mapped and the threats to koalas identified, the information is shared with land managers and local communities to build capacity for protecting koalas and restoring koala habitats.

During the 2019–2020 bushfires, 75%–100% of the mapped koala habitats across the five study sites were impacted. Science for Wildlife undertook a range of emergency response actions including the first emergency evacuation of koalas, search and rescue for burnt koalas, and supply of food and water stations for a range of threatened species.

The rescued koalas were returned home three months after the fires, based on research showing conditions had improved enough to support them. One female had given birth in care and so while 12 koalas were rescued, 13 were returned to the wild. The Science for Wildlife Team monitored these koalas intensively for over 12 months and the data revealed a significant increase in the area the koalas used (known as a home range) after fires since they needed to travel further to find good quality food trees. Science for Wildlife has also completed over 400 post-fire surveys to map surviving koalas at other sites and find out where they survived and how they are using the burnt landscape. This research is filling critical information gaps about how bushfires impact koalas over time and the driving factors behind the ability for koala populations to recover.



Dr Kellie Leigh, Science for Wildlife releasing rescued koala and joey in Kanangra-Boyd National Park. Credit Ian Brown. Further information on the [Blue Mountains Koala Project](#) can be found on the Science for Wildlife website.

2.1.8 Recovery monitoring

Several additional monitoring programs have been introduced to assess the recovery of threatened species in fire-affected areas of the GBMA. **Case Study 5** is an example of one such program.

Case Study 5 *Leionema lachnaeoides*

Leionema lachnaeoides

Leionema lachnaeoides is a NSW and Australian government listed endangered plant species in the Rutaceae family, with a pre-fire population of fewer than 450 individuals. It only occurs on the upper escarpments between Shipley Plateau and Narrow Neck in the upper Blue Mountains and little was previously known about its life history in response to fire.

High intensity fire during December 2019 killed all 14 *Leionema lachnaeoides* at the Narrow Neck site. The remaining individuals were not impacted by the fire.

No recruitment or re-sprouting was evident six months post fire monitoring at the Narrow Neck site, however after 12 months there was extensive recruitment with over 120 individuals recorded. It appears this species is an obligate seeder, that is, it can only germinate from seed after fire.



Leionema lachnaeoides at the Narrow Neck site. The background photo was taken seven weeks post fire in February 2020. Foreground image shows 70mm seedling in January 2021. Credit NPWS.

2.1.9 Supporting post-fire recovery

Activities to support post-fire recovery in the GBM include control of feral animals, weed control, waterway rehabilitation, declaration of Assets of Intergenerational Significance, and the Fire Access and Fire Trail Program. Further detail on each of these activities is set out in this section.

Control of feral animals

A series of projects to reduce the impacts of competition and predation from feral animals on fauna and flora of the GBMA, surrounding reserves and private lands adjoining the park, is underway. Fire events can interact with invasive predators, compounding threats to fauna.

A large-scale project delivering aerial shooting and aerial baiting across multiple protected areas within the GBMA is targeting vertebrate feral animal species, while ground-based baiting, fencing, trapping and shooting is also being delivered to control feral cats, foxes, deer, pigs and goats. Remote camera monitoring operates in key locations, with species such as brush-tailed rock-wallabies and spotted-tailed quolls observed on cameras set up to monitor feral animals. Results indicate these threatened species are in good condition with improved abundance and distribution in locations that were severely burnt in the bushfires.



Replacing burnt monitoring cameras, Wollemi National Park. Credit NPWS.

Weed control

Weed control projects across the GBMA and adjacent lands are supporting the recovery of threatened ecological communities and threatened species habitat. Projects include mechanical and chemical weed control at key sites; fencing to reduce the spread of pasture weeds into refugia by feral animals, and support for volunteer weeding events.



Funding has enhanced access to remote sites for weeding projects in the Wollemi National Park. Credit NPWS.

Waterway rehabilitation

Rehabilitation of sensitive habitats to protect priority species from the impacts of post-fire erosion includes works such as the control of sycamore maples to support regeneration of native ground cover, and stabilising eroded slopes. Other rehabilitation works include hard-hoofed pest control of deer, pigs, goats and horses, to reduce streambank erosion and swamp incision.

Declaration of Assets of Intergenerational Significance

Legislative amendments in 2021 have enabled the NSW Minister for the Environment and Heritage to declare land in the national parks reserve system an environmental or cultural [Asset of Intergenerational Significance \(AIS\)](#). An AIS declaration requires the implementation of a conservation action plan, which sets out specific priority actions to protect the asset, identifies risks to the asset, and requires data collection and regular reporting on the state of the asset.

The Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) is a highly restricted, ancient relict species with Gondwanan affinities. In early 2021, the Wollemi pine habitat area in the GBMA was the first site in NSW to be declared an AIS. Since then, over 270 sites of the most important habitat for over 100 threatened species across NSW have been declared, including key sites for a further ten threatened species within the GBMA.

Fire Access and Fire Trail (FAFT) program

In response to the NSW Bushfire Inquiry's recommendation for a state-wide strategic fire trail network, the Fire Access and Fire Trail (FAFT) program has identified networks of strategic and tactical fire trails across public and private land in NSW. NPWS is working with the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and local Bush Fire Management Committees to upgrade works across the state, with approximately A\$15 million for 2020-23 allocated for works in the GBMA and adjacent areas.

2.2 Proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall

Decision 44 COM 7B.180 Paragraph 5:

Takes note of the information provided by the State Party regarding the ongoing preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall, reiterates its request to the State Party to ensure, in line with its commitments, that the current process to prepare the EIS fully assesses all potential impacts on the OUV of the property and its other values, including Aboriginal cultural heritage, and also requests the State Party to thoroughly assess whether raising the wall could exacerbate bushfire impacts on the property and affect the medium- and longer-term recovery prospects of key species and habitats within the predicted temporary inundation areas, and to submit the EIS to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, prior to its final approval;

State Party's response

2.2.1 Overview of the proposal

Warragamba Dam, which was opened in 1960 prior to the World Heritage listing of the GBMA in 2000, is located west of Sydney in NSW. Its reservoir, Lake Burragorang, is formed by the damming of the Warragamba River with its major tributaries being the Coxs, Wollondilly, Kowmung and Nattai rivers. Warragamba Dam and Lake Burragorang are located outside of the GBMA. Lake Burragorang supplies water to more than five million people living in Sydney and the lower Blue Mountains. It is one of the largest domestic water supply dams in the world and stores around 80% of Sydney's water supply. Warragamba Dam is owned and operated by WaterNSW (a NSW Government owned corporation) under the provisions of the *Water NSW Act 2014*.

The proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall for flood mitigation is one of nine key outcomes of the NSW Government's flood risk management strategy for the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley. The purpose of the proposed dam wall raising is to reduce and/or delay flooding downstream, significantly reducing risk to lives and property, and allowing additional time for evacuation during major floods. Use of the additional capacity would only operate during flood conditions.

2.2.2 Statutory assessment processes

The Warragamba Dam wall raising proposal is being assessed under the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessments Act 1979* and separately under the EPBC Act. The NSW assessment process has been accredited under a bilateral agreement between NSW and the Australian Government for the purpose of the EPBC Act. This means that a single Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process will be used for both the approval decisions to be made under the NSW Act and the EPBC Act.

Raising the wall would increase the frequency, duration, depth and/or extent of temporary inundation of areas located upstream of the dam, including within the GBMA. The proposal is being assessed for potential impacts on the OUV of the property and its other values, including National Heritage listed values, nationally listed threatened species, and cultural values. The NSW Department of Planning and Environment requested the proponent to consider in the assessment whether raising the wall could exacerbate bushfire risk and recovery of species and habitat within the world heritage areas. This was also a recommendation in the IUCN Technical Review of the EIS, which was received by the Australian Government on 11 January 2022.

The EIS for the Warragamba Dam wall raising proposal was published and made available for public comment on the NSW Department of Planning and Environment website from September to December 2021. A link to the report was provided to the World Heritage Centre on 29 September 2021, as requested by the World Heritage Committee (43 COM 7B.2 paragraphs 3 and 4). The EIS for the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall can be viewed on the NSW Government's planning portal ([Warragamba Dam Raising | Planning Portal – Department of Planning and Environment \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)).

The assessment is ongoing and will consider public submissions made in 2021, including the [IUCN Technical Review](#). A decision by the NSW Minister on whether the proposal should be approved is required under NSW environmental protection legislation, before any decision under the EPBC Act. The final decision on whether the proposal should be approved under the EPBC Act will be made by the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Water. These decisions are pending.

2.3 Cumulative assessment of the impacts of mining adjacent to the GBMA

Decision 44 COM 7B.180 Paragraph 6:

Notes the initiation of an assessment of the cumulative impacts of existing and planned mining projects in the vicinity of the property, including a specific assessment of all stressors that present a risk to the property's OUV ... and further requests the State Party to submit the results of these processes to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, as soon as they become available;

State Party's response

2.3.1 Assessment of the potential cumulative impacts of mining

In 2019, the World Heritage Committee requested the Australian Government undertake an assessment of the potential cumulative impacts of all existing and planned mining projects in the vicinity of the GBMA (43 COM 7B.2).

In response, the Australian Government worked with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the NSW Government to undertake a regional scale assessment of potential cumulative impacts of mining on the OUV of the property. The assessment considered potential impacts of 15 coal mines and three sand mines within 20 kms of the GBMA to evaluate how stressors of nearby mines may impact components of the GBMA's OUV. Potential for the 2019–2020 bushfires to increase vulnerability of the property's OUV to mining threats was also considered.

The assessment found residual risk to the OUV of the property to be low as most potential impacts are effectively mitigated by strict environmental conditions on mine operators. The final report on the assessment process was forwarded to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN, on 19 January 2022, and is publicly available on the [Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water website](#).

2.3.2 Protecting the GBMA from the impacts of mining

The Australian Government is committed to protecting the OUV of its World Heritage properties from the impacts of mining and other activities. Mining is in effect prohibited in the GBMA because

under the EPBC Act the Minister cannot approve proposals that are inconsistent with Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention. Actions that may impact the OUV of a World Heritage property, whether originating in or outside the boundary, must be referred to the Australian Government for assessment and approval.

In addition, under its 2022 *Strategic Statement on Coal Exploration and Mining*, the NSW Government undertakes assessments of areas proposed for coal exploration. Following rigorous assessment processes that included public consultation, the NSW Government decided, in December 2021 and May 2022 respectively, not to release for exploration the Hawkins and Rumker, and Ganguddy-Kelgoola areas, near the GBMA, for environmental, cultural and commercial reasons.

2.4 Western Sydney International Airport

Decision 44 COM 7B.180 Paragraph 6:

Notes ... the confirmation regarding the development of the airspace and flight path design for the Western Sydney Airport and its subsequent environmental assessment, and further requests the State Party to submit the results of these processes to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, as soon as they become available;

State Party's response

The impact of the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport on the GBMA was initially assessed in the Western Sydney Airport Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) 2016. The 2016 EIS found that the construction and operation of the airport is unlikely to have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of the Greater Blue Mountains Area or result in attributes of the GBMA being lost or damaged.

This initial assessment was based on indicative flight path design. Preliminary flight path design began in 2021 and, once complete, the final design will be assessed by an EIS process. The EIS will identify any potential impacts on the natural, cultural, heritage and socio-economic values of the GBMA, including impacts on OUV. The EIS is expected to be released for public consultation in 2023. The results of this assessment will be provided to the World Heritage Centre.

2.5 Strategic Management Framework

Decision 44 COM 7B.180 Paragraph 7:

Welcomes the continued development of a revised Strategic Plan for the property and the confirmation that this plan will undergo consultation with the Aboriginal communities and be subject to the necessary environmental assessment, and also reiterates its request to the State Party to ensure that potential threats to the property from activities outside its boundaries, in particular mining activities, are fully considered in the development of this management framework;

State Party's response

An update of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Strategic Plan (NSW NPWS 2009) is underway. The new plan will consider all potential threats to the property, including from activities

outside its boundaries. Consultation with Traditional Custodians and the broader community is scheduled for early 2023.

2.6 Consultation with IUCN

Decision 44 COM 7B.180 Paragraph 8:

Encourages the State Party to consult IUCN for advice on the development of the EIS planning documents prior to their finalisation, as well as on the development of longer-term bushfire recovery plans for the property's OUV;

State Party's response

The World Heritage Centre and IUCN were provided with the EIS for the proposed raising of the Warragamba Dam wall for review on 19 September 2021 (see Section 2.2). When further EIS documentation for this proposal is available, Australia will consult the IUCN. Similarly, Australia will consult IUCN on the Western Sydney International Airport EIS when it is released for public comment (see Section 2.4).

The report on the cumulative impact assessment of mining adjacent to the GBMA was forwarded to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN, on 19 January 2022.

In addition to bushfire recovery activities and planning outlined in Section 2.1, longer-term bushfire recovery planning is being developed and will be referenced in the *Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Strategic Plan*. Australia will provide the draft of the new Strategic Plan to IUCN for review when it is released for public consultation (see Section 2.5).

2.7 Impacts of climate change

Decision 44 COM 7B.180 Paragraph 9:

Also recalling Decision 41 COM 7, adopted at its 41st session (Krakow, 2017), which reiterated the importance of States Parties undertaking the most ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), notes with concern that climate change is recognized as an increasing threat to the property, and further welcomes the efforts of the State Party to develop an understanding of projected changes resulting from climate change in relation to the property's OUV and to strengthen climate and disaster resilience;

State Party's response

In May 2022, Australia held a federal election, which resulted in a change of government for the country. The newly elected Government has committed to work towards combatting climate change, reducing emissions, transitioning to renewable energy, and building climate resilience and readiness in Australia. One of the first actions of the new government was to legislate new climate targets.

The Australian Government is committed to taking effective action to manage the impact of climate change. Australia's target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 43% below 2005 levels by 2030 puts it on track to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. Achievement of Australia's 2030 and 2050 emissions reduction targets will contribute towards the Paris Agreement global temperature goal of

holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The 2030 target is a floor, not a ceiling, in Australia's emissions reduction ambition. Australia's trajectory to net zero will be set through successive emissions reduction targets. Successive targets will be informed by advice from the independent Climate Change Authority that will explain how the targets have taken into account the matters set out in Article 2 of the Paris Agreement, including the global temperature goal. These target-setting processes, along with the targets themselves, are enshrined in national legislation, the *Climate Change Act 2022*.

The legislation also strengthens accountability through an annual statement by the Minister for Climate Change to Parliament, and tasks the independent Climate Change Authority to provide advice on Australia's progress towards these targets and on what Australia's future targets should be.

Reducing the impacts of climate change on Australia's World Heritage properties through adaptation planning and building resilience is a key focus of the Australian Government. Some of the monitoring and conservation actions to respond to the 2019–2020 bushfires reported in Section 2.1, such as actions assisting with recovery of plant and animal populations and increasing the size and health of those populations, will also help to build the resilience of the GBMA.

The Australian Government established a new agency, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water in 2022. The World Heritage functions of the Australian Government are managed by this department.

2.8 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Decision 44 COM 7B.180 Paragraph 10:

Appreciates the efforts made through the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements to look at lessons learned, develop recommendations on how to strengthen emergency management as well as climate and natural disaster risk reduction, and to implement reforms based on experience, and also encourages the State Party to share the lessons learned with other States Parties to the Convention facing similar threats, promoting knowledge exchange on fire management strategies at natural World Heritage properties;

State Party's response

2.8.1 Overview

The outcomes of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements were provided to the World Heritage Centre in December 2020 as part of an update to the April 2020 state of conservation report. On 13 November 2020, the Australian Government published its response to the Royal Commission – [A national approach to national disasters](#). The Australian Government supported, or supported in principle, all recommendations directed to the Commonwealth.

In 2020, the Australian Government agreed to establish a National Emergency Management Ministers Meeting to coordinate implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

[Details of the implementation](#) of the 80 recommendations are available on the National Emergency Management Agency website.

The lessons learned from the 2019–2020 bushfires in the Greater Blue Mountains Area are available to other States Parties in reports and web links in the Bibliography of this report. The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to share lessons learned with other States Parties whose World Heritage properties are facing similar threats.

2.8.2 Response to the NSW Bushfire Inquiry

The NSW Bushfire Inquiry into the 2019–2020 bushfire season made 76 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the NSW Government. [Quarterly updates](#) are available from the NSW Government Department of Premier and Cabinet website.

Between 2020 and 2022, the NSW Government provided a series of funding packages (of over A\$275 million) in response to several NSW Bushfire Inquiry recommendations, and increased NSW NPWS capacity for both hazard reduction and bushfire response.

A number of bushfire recovery projects included in **Section 2.1** have been funded through these packages.



NPWS Remote area firefighting teams. Credit T. Johnson NPWS.

3 Other current conservation issues identified by the State Party which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value

3.1 Managing the impact of major flood events

The flooding events of early and mid-2022 along the east coast of Australia, following major floods in early 2020 and 2021, caused further landslides, tree falls, flood debris, and major repeat damage to facilities and infrastructure including roads, fire trails, bridges, causeways and walking tracks across the GBMA. Damage is still being assessed in more remote areas. There have been property-wide and local closures for visitor safety, and general warnings about the risk of entering bushland areas in all reserves from rising creeks, landslides and tree falls.

The management of infrastructure, especially damaged assets that threaten the integrity of a park's natural, cultural and social values, is one of the NPWS's principal land management functions. NPWS has a statutory obligation to ensure recovery of damaged assets following on from a major flood event, ensuring they are safe and functional to protect not only the environment, but also staff, park visitors and neighbours.

In March 2022, the NSW Government announced the NSW Parliamentary Flood Inquiry into the response to the major flooding that occurred across NSW in early 2022. The [final report](#) was released on 9 August 2022 and included 37 recommendations to the NSW Government with consideration of flood impacted areas across the state.

There was also an [independent inquiry into the flood response in NSW](#), which put forward 28 recommendations which have all been supported or supported in principle by the NSW Government.

3.2 Mapping and additional adjacent reserves

3.2.1 Retrospective Inventory Project

As part of the World Heritage Centre's Retrospective Inventory Project, Australia has been asked to submit an updated map of the GBMA boundary as inscribed on the World Heritage List. To ensure the Centre has an accurate map of the property, Australia is reviewing changes that occurred to the boundaries of the component reserves that make up the GBMA after nomination and prior to World Heritage listing. An updated map will be forwarded to the Centre when the review is complete.

3.2.2 Creation of Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area

The NSW Government has increased protection of lands bordering part of the western boundary of the GBMA. On 6 May 2022, the former Newnes, Ben Bullen and Wolgan State Forests were gazetted

under the NPW Act to form the new [Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area](#) (28,322 hectares), which has enhanced the connectivity with the World Heritage property.



View of part of the Greater Blue Mountains Area. Credit NPWS.

4 Potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) intended within the property, the buffer zone(s) and/or corridors or other areas, where such developments may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including authenticity and integrity

4.1 Quarterly reporting to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre

In accordance with paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, the Australian Government routinely informs the World Heritage Centre of potential development activities that may affect the OUV of Australia's World Heritage properties.

Notification reports and a full list of proposed, approved and withdrawn proposals relating to the GBMA (and other World Heritage Properties) that require consideration under the EPBC Act are available at: [World Heritage Committee notification of development proposals](#).

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Appendix A: Decision 44 COM 7B.180 about the Greater Blue Mountains Area adopted by the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou, 2021)

Greater Blue Mountains Area (Australia) (N 917)

Decision: 44 COM 7B.180

The World Heritage Committee,

- 1) Having examined Document WHC/21/44.COM/7B.Add,
- 2) Recalling Decision **43 COM 7B.2**, adopted at its 43rd session (Baku, 2019),
- 3) Expresses its utmost concern about the unprecedented fires that affected large parts of the property and significantly impacted some areas and habitats, and commends the State Party for its immediate fire-fighting responses, including those targeting specific attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, such as the Wollemi pine stands;
- 4) Welcomes the information provided by the State Party regarding the immediate management responses to the 2019–2020 bushfires, including the assessment of direct and indirect impacts, plans for longer-term actions and the consideration of funding commitments to ensure long-term recovery, and requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, an update on the process of assessing the impacts of fires on the OUV of the property and its recovery prospects, as soon as this significant information has been collated;
- 5) Takes note of the information provided by the State Party regarding the ongoing preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall, reiterates its request to the State Party to ensure, in line with its commitments, that the current process to prepare the EIS fully assesses all potential impacts on the OUV of the property and its other values, including Aboriginal cultural heritage, and also requests the State Party to thoroughly assess whether raising the wall could exacerbate bushfire impacts on the property and affect the medium- and longer-term recovery prospects of key species and habitats within the predicted temporary inundation areas, and to submit the EIS to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, prior to its final approval;
- 6) Notes the initiation of an assessment of the cumulative impacts of existing and planned mining projects in the vicinity of the property, including a specific assessment of all stressors that present a risk to the property's OUV, and the confirmation regarding the development of the airspace and flight path design for the Western Sydney Airport and its subsequent environmental assessment, and further requests the State Party to submit the results of these processes to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, as soon as they become available;

- 7) Also welcomes the continued development of a revised Strategic Plan for the property and the confirmation that this plan will undergo consultation with the Aboriginal communities and be subject to the necessary environmental assessment, and also reiterates its request to the State Party to ensure that potential threats to the property from activities outside its boundaries, in particular mining activities, are fully considered in the development of this management framework;
- 8) Encourages the State Party to consult IUCN for advice on the development of the EIS planning documents prior to their finalisation, as well as on the development of longer-term bushfire recovery plans for the property's OUV;
- 9) Also recalling Decision **41 COM 7**, adopted at its 41st session (Krakow, 2017), which reiterated the importance of States Parties undertaking the most ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), notes with concern that climate change is recognized as an increasing threat to the property, and further welcomes the efforts of the State Party to develop an understanding of projected changes resulting from climate change in relation to the property's OUV and to strengthen climate and disaster resilience;
- 10) Appreciates the efforts made through the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements to look at lessons learned, develop recommendations on how to strengthen emergency management as well as climate and natural disaster risk reduction, and to implement reforms based on experience, and also encourages the State Party to share the lessons learned with other States Parties to the Convention facing similar threats, promoting knowledge exchange on fire management strategies at natural World Heritage properties;
- 11) Requests furthermore the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 December 2022**, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 46th session.

Appendix B: Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the Greater Blue Mountains Area, adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2013

Brief synthesis

The Greater Blue Mountains Area (GBMA) is a deeply incised sandstone tableland that encompasses 1.03 million hectares of eucalypt-dominated landscape just inland from Sydney, Australia's largest city, in south-eastern Australia. Spread across eight adjacent conservation reserves, it constitutes one of the largest and most intact tracts of protected bushland in Australia. It also supports an exceptional representation of the taxonomic, physiognomic and ecological diversity that eucalypts have developed: an outstanding illustration of the evolution of plant life. A number of rare and endemic taxa, including relict flora such as the Wollemi pine, also occur here. Ongoing research continues to reveal the rich scientific value of the area as more species are discovered.

The geology and geomorphology of the property, which includes 300 metre cliffs, slot canyons and waterfalls, provides the physical conditions and visual backdrop to support these outstanding biological values. The property includes large areas of accessible wilderness in close proximity to 4.5 million people. Its exceptional biodiversity values are complemented by numerous others, including indigenous and post-European-settlement cultural values, geodiversity, water production, wilderness, recreation and natural beauty.

Criterion (ix): The Greater Blue Mountains include outstanding and representative examples in a relatively small area of the evolution and adaptation of the genus *Eucalyptus* and eucalypt-dominated vegetation on the Australian continent. The site contains a wide and balanced representation of eucalypt habitats including wet and dry sclerophyll forests and mallee heathlands, as well as localised swamps, wetlands and grassland. It is a centre of diversification for the Australian scleromorphic flora, including significant aspects of eucalypt evolution and radiation. Representative examples of the dynamic processes in its eucalypt-dominated ecosystems cover the full range of interactions between eucalypts, understorey, fauna, environment and fire. The site includes primitive species of outstanding significance to the evolution of the earth's plant life, such as the highly restricted Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) and the Blue Mountains pine (*Pherosphaera fitzgeraldii*). These are examples of ancient, relict species with Gondwanan affinities that have survived past climatic changes and demonstrate the highly unusual juxtaposition of Gondwanan taxa with the diverse scleromorphic flora.

Criterion (x): The site includes an outstanding diversity of habitats and plant communities that support its globally significant species and ecosystem diversity (152 plant families, 484 genera and c. 1,500 species). A significant proportion of the Australian continent's biodiversity, especially its scleromorphic flora, occur in the area. Plant families represented by exceptionally high levels of species diversity here include Myrtaceae (150 species), Fabaceae (149 species), and Proteaceae (77

species). Eucalypts (*Eucalyptus*, *Angophora* and *Corymbia*, all in the family *Myrtaceae*) which dominate the Australian continent are well represented by more than 90 species (13% of the global total). The genus *Acacia* (in the family *Fabaceae*) is represented by 64 species. The site includes primitive and relictual species with Gondwanan affinities (*Wollemia*, *Ptherosphaera*, *Lomatia*, *Dracophyllum*, *Acrophyllum*, *Podocarpus* and *Atkinsonia*) and supports many plants of conservation significance including 114 endemic species and 177 threatened species.

The diverse plant communities and habitats support more than 400 vertebrate taxa (of which 40 are threatened), comprising some 52 mammal, 63 reptile, over 30 frog and about one third (265 species) of Australia's bird species. Charismatic vertebrates such as the platypus and echidna occur in the area. Although invertebrates are still poorly known, the area supports an estimated 120 butterfly and 4,000 moth species, and a rich cave invertebrate fauna (67 taxa).

Integrity

The seven adjacent national parks and single karst conservation reserve that comprise the GBMA are of sufficient size to protect the biota and ecosystem processes, although the boundary has several anomalies that reduce the effectiveness of its 1-million-hectare size. This is explained by historical patterns of clearing and private land ownership that preceded establishment of the parks. However, parts of the convoluted boundary reflect topography, such as escarpments that act as barriers to potential adverse impacts from adjoining land. In addition, much of the property is largely protected by adjoining public lands of State Forests and State Conservation Areas. Additional regulatory mechanisms, such as the statutory wilderness designation of 65% of the property, the closed and protected catchment for the Warragamba Dam and additions to the conservation reserves that comprise the area further protect the integrity of the GBMA. Since listing, proposals for a second Sydney airport at Badgerys Creek, adjacent to the GBMA, have been abandoned.

Most of the natural bushland of the GBMA is of high wilderness quality and remains close to pristine. The plant communities and habitats occur almost entirely as an extensive, largely undisturbed matrix almost entirely free of structures, earthworks and other human intervention. Because of its size and connectivity with other protected areas, the area will continue to play a vital role in providing opportunities for adaptation and shifts in range for all native plant and animal species within it, allowing essential ecological processes to continue. The area's integrity depends upon the complexity of its geological structure, geomorphology and water systems, which have created the conditions for the evolution of its outstanding biodiversity, and which require the same level of protection.

An understanding of the cultural context of the GBMA is fundamental to the protection of its integrity. Aboriginal people from six language groups, through ongoing practices that reflect both traditional and contemporary presence, continue to have a custodial relationship with the area. Occupation sites and rock art provide physical evidence of the longevity of the strong Aboriginal cultural connections with the land. The conservation of these associations, together with the elements of the property's natural beauty, contributes to its integrity.

Protection and management requirements

The GBMA is protected and managed under legislation of both the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of NSW. All World Heritage properties in Australia are 'matters of national environmental significance' protected and managed under national legislation, the *Environment Protection and*

Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. This Act is the statutory instrument for implementing Australia's obligations under a number of multilateral environmental agreements including the World Heritage Convention. By law, any action that has, will have or is likely to have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of a World Heritage property must be referred to the responsible Minister for consideration. Substantial penalties apply for taking such an action without approval. Once a heritage place is listed, the Act provides for the preparation of management plans which set out the significant heritage aspects of the place and how the values of the site will be managed.

Importantly, this Act also aims to protect matters of national environmental significance, such as World Heritage properties, from impacts even if they originate outside the property or if the values of the property are mobile (as in fauna). It thus forms an additional layer of protection designed to protect values of World Heritage properties from external impacts. In 2007, the GBMA was added to the National Heritage List, in recognition of its national heritage significance under the Act.

A single State government agency, the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, manages the area. All the reserves that comprise the GBMA are subject to the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and the *Wilderness Act 1987*. Other relevant legislation includes the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*, the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, the *Sydney Water Catchment Management Act 1998* and the *Heritage Act 1977*.

At the time of nomination statutory management plans for the constituent reserves of the GBMA were in place or in preparation, and these are reviewed every 7-10 years. All management plans have been gazetted, and those for three component reserves (Wollemi, Blue Mountains, and Kanangra-Boyd National Parks, which constitute 80% of the property) are under revision for greater emphasis on the protection of identified values. An over-arching Strategic Plan for the property provides a framework for its integrated management, protection, interpretation and monitoring.

The major management challenges identified in the Strategic Plan fall into six categories: uncontrolled or inappropriate use of fire; inappropriate recreation and tourism activities, including the development of tourism infrastructure, due to increasing Australian and overseas visitor pressure and commercial ventures; invasion by pest species including weeds and feral animals; loss of biodiversity and geodiversity at all levels; impacts of human-enhanced climate change; and lack of understanding of heritage values.

The set of key management objectives set out in the Strategic Plan provides the philosophical basis for the management of the area and guidance for operational strategies, in accordance with requirements of the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines. These objectives are also consistent with the Australian World Heritage management principles, contained in regulations under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Appendix C: Species within the Greater Blue Mountains Area funded through the NSW Government Saving our Species Program

Note: (PS) denotes species also included in the Australian Government's [list of 100 Priority Species under the Threatened Species Strategy](#).

Acacia gordonii

Anthochaera phrygia (regent honeyeater) (PS)

Baeckea kandos

Callistemon megalongensis (Megalong Valley bottlebrush)

Calyptorhynchus lathami (glossy black cockatoo)

Darwinia peduncularis

Dasyurus maculatus (spotted-tailed quoll)

Diuris aequalis (buttercup doubletail)

Epacris hamiltonii

Epacris sparsa (sparse heath)

Eucalyptus macarthurii (Paddys River box, Camden woollybutt)

Euphrasia bowdeniae (Blue Mountains cliff eyebright)

Isopogon fletcheri (Fletcher's drumsticks)

Leionema lachnaeoides

Litoria daviesae (Davie's tree frog)

Litoria littlejohni (Littlejohn's tree frog)

Mixophyes balbus (stuttering frog)

Olearia cordata

Persoonia acerosa (needle geebung)

Persoonia glaucescens (Mittagong geebung)

Petrogale penicillata (brush-tailed rock-wallaby) (PS)

Phascolarctos cinereus (koala) (PS)

Pherosphaera fitzgeraldii (dwarf mountain pine)

Pultenaea glabra (smooth bush-pea)

Tetratheca glandulosa

Trachymene scapigera (mountain trachymene)

Wollemia nobilis (Wollemi pine) (PS)

Zieria covenyi (Coveny's zieria)