



**Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)** is the key reference point for the protection and management of properties and is central to the World Heritage (WH) Convention.

**Outstanding** – For properties to be of outstanding universal value, they should be exceptional or superlative – and the most remarkable places on earth.

**Universal** – Properties need to be outstanding from a global perspective, not just remarkable from solely a national or regional perspective.

**Value** – What makes a property outstanding and universal is its ‘value’ or worth, based on standards and processes outlined in the WH Convention.

Properties on the List are places that are important to, and belong to, everyone. They are an irreplaceable legacy that the global community wants to protect for the future. There are ten criteria for OUV, six cultural and four natural.

To be inscribed on the WH List, properties must:

- Meet one or more of ten criteria for outstanding universal value
- Meet the conditions of integrity (natural) or authenticity (cultural)
- Have an adequate system of protection and management to safeguard their future.

### **Integrity of a World Heritage Area**

To be considered a natural property of outstanding universal value, it must also meet the conditions of integrity. The integrity is a measure of the **wholeness** and **intactness** of the natural heritage and its attributes.

The conditions of integrity, therefore require assessing the extent to which the property;

- a) includes all elements necessary to express its OUV
- b) is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes which convey the property’s significance, and
- c) suffers from adverse effects of development and/or neglect.

### **Protection and Management Requirements**

All properties inscribed on the WH List must have adequate protection and management mechanisms in place. All Australian properties on the List are automatically ‘declared WH properties’ under the Commonwealth EPBC Act.

## **The Shark Bay World Heritage Area**

The Shark Bay World Heritage Area was inscribed on the WH List in 1991 on the basis of its outstanding universal natural values and encompasses about 2.2 million hectares, with 65% in the marine environment and about 1 500 km of coastline.

The Shark Bay property contains an outstanding example of the Earth's evolutionary history with its microbial communities, including the stromatolites of Hamelin Pool. Significant ongoing geological and biological processes occur in both the marine and terrestrial environments of Shark Bay.

The property includes the habitat of a number of threatened species, with many other species that are endemic or at the limit of their range. The Wooramel Seagrass Bank, Faure Sill and associated hydrologic structure, and the Zuytdorp Cliffs are examples of the many superlative natural phenomena or features to be found in the WH property.

## **Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value**

### **Brief Synthesis**

On the Indian Ocean coast at the most westerly point of Australia, Shark Bay's waters, island and peninsulas covering a large area of some 2.2 million hectares have a number of exceptional natural features, including one of the largest and most diverse seagrass beds in the world with 12 species being recorded in one area. It is for its stromatolites (colonies of microbial mats that form hard, dome-shaped deposits which are said to be the oldest life forms on earth), that the property is most renowned. It is also famous for its rich marine life, including a large population of dugongs, and provides a refuge for a number of other globally threatened species.

### **Criterion (vii)**

One of the superlative natural phenomena in this property is its stromatolites, which represent the oldest form of life on Earth and are comparable to living fossils. Shark Bay is also one of the few marine areas in the world dominated by carbonates not associated with reef-building corals. This has led to the development of the Wooramel Seagrass Bank within Shark Bay. These values are supplemented by marine fauna such as dugong, dolphins, sharks, rays, turtles and fish, which occur in great numbers.

The hydrologic structure of Shark Bay, altered by the formation of the Faure Sill and a high evaporation, has produced a basin where marine waters are hypersaline (almost twice that of seawater) and contributed to extensive beaches consisting entirely of shells. The profusion of peninsulas, islands and bays create a diversity of landscapes and exceptional coastal scenery.

### **Criterion (viii)**

Shark Bay contains, in the hypersaline Hamelin Pool, the most diverse and abundant examples of stromatolites in the world. These are analogous structures dominated marine ecosystems on Earth for more than 3 000 million years.

The Wooramel Seagrass Bank is also of great geological interest due to the extensive deposit of limestone sands associated with the bank, formed by calcium carbonate from hypersaline waters.

### **Criterion (ix)**

Shark Bay provides outstanding examples of processes of biological and geomorphic evolution taking place in a largely unmodified environment, including the evolution of the Bay's hydrological system, hypersaline environment of Hamelin Pool and the biological processes.

One of the exceptional features of Shark Bay is the steep gradient in salinities, creating three biotic zones that effect the distribution and abundance of marine organisms. Hypersaline conditions exist in Hamelin Pool.

The unusual features of Shark Bay have also created the Wooramel Seagrass Bank. Seagrasses are aquatic flowering plants that form meadows in near-shore brackish or marine waters in temperate and tropical regions, producing one of the world's most productive aquatic ecosystems.

### **Criterion (x)**

Shark Bay is a refuge for many globally threatened species of plants and animals. The property is located at the transition zone between two of Western Australia's main botanical provinces, with many species at the limit of their southern or northern range. The property contains either the only or major populations of five globally threatened mammals, including the Burrowing Bettong (Near Threatened), Rufous Hare Wallaby, Shark Bay Mouse and the Western Barred Bandicoot. A number of globally threatened plant and reptile species also occur in the terrestrial part of the property.

Shark Bay's sheltered coves and lush seagrass beds are a haven for marine species, including Green and Loggerhead Turtles (both Endangered and Australia's most important nesting areas Loggerheads). Shark Bay is one of the world's most significant and secure strongholds for the protection of Dugong, with a population of around 10 000. Increasing numbers of Humpback and Southern Right Whales use Shark Bay as a migratory staging post, and a famous population of Bottlenose Dolphin lives in the Bay. Large numbers of sharks and rays are readily observed, including the Manta Ray which is now considered globally threatened.

### **Protection and Management Requirements**

A management agreement between the Australian Government and the State of Western Australia provides for management of the property to be carried out by the Western Australian Government in accordance with Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention.

Owing to the diversity of land tenures, managing agencies and individual interests within the property, the Shark Bay World Heritage Property Strategic Plan 2008-2020 was prepared to develop a partnership between governments and the community.

Any proposed activity which may have a significant impact on the property became subject to the provisions of the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act), which regulates actions that will, or are likely to, have a significant impact on World Heritage values. In 2007, Shark Bay was added to the National Heritage List, in recognition of its national heritage significance under the Act.