



Lord Howe Island, Australia- Managing the Cultural Values of a World Heritage Island Ecosystem

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■ Abstract

Lord Howe Island is listed on the World Heritage List in recognition of its natural landscapes and scenery and as an outstanding example of an island ecosystem developed from submarine volcanic activity. The island is also listed on the State Heritage Register (SHR) for its cultural heritage significance to New South Wales, Australia, a large part of which relates to the island's earliest people and their agricultural practice.

The role of the Senior Heritage Assessment Officer is to assist the managers with the island's protection, conservation, and promotion of the island's cultural heritage. However, the island's globally recognized natural values currently greatly outweigh the recognition and protection of its cultural values. I aim to improve interlinkages between the management of its cultural and natural heritage values through inter-governmental collaboration between state, national, and World Heritage agencies.

KEY WORDS: Lord Howe Island, Australia, volcanic, State, World Heritage

■ 1. Introduction

1.1 The heritage site

The Lord House Island Group consists of a grouping of small islands in the Tasman Sea, 600 kilometers (370 miles) directly east of Australia, between Australia and New Zealand. Although they lie outside of the normal bounds of state territorial waters, the islands are classified as part of the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia.

The main island of the Lord Howe Island Group is an irregularly crescent-shaped volcanic island with two spectacular sheer-sided mountains on the northern side, a flat sandy center, and a coral reef on the western side. The settled part of the island, which is located in the center, has a population of 360 residents. The other islands in the group:

Admiralty Island, Mutton Bird Island, Gower Island, and Blackburn Island, are all smaller and uninhabited.

The first known discovery of the island was by Europeans in 1788, during their colonization of Australia. It remained an untouched natural landscape until 1833 when it was settled as a provisioning station for whalers; there is no evidence of indigenous occupation or Polynesian visitation prior to this, possibly due to its location outside of the typical Polynesian voyaging routes.

The island has become a popular tourist destination due to its unique and relatively untouched natural beauty, with about 14,000 tourists visiting each year. The main economic activity on the island is currently associated with tourism, although agricultural industries also make a significant contribution.



Figure 1. View from Kim's Lookout, towards the settled part of Lord Howe Island, facing north towards the mountains, (David Stanley, flkr, 2016 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidstanleytravel/>)

1.2 The agricultural landscape

The soil, water, and climate of the island provides favorable conditions for market gardening and agriculture on the island. The first settlers were able to sustain themselves with their own resources using a unique combination of Polynesian and European farming techniques. The island, which was first used as a stopover for boats to collect water and fresh provisions, began to produce and export an abundance of resources, including: mangoes, ginger, apples, onions, potatoes, cedar, tobacco, poultry, and pork to passing whaling ships (Betteridge 2012).

The island also contains a unique species of native palm trees, including the Kentia Palm (*Howea forsteriana*), which grows in abundance on the island due to its remarkable tolerance to the cool, temperate, climate of the island. The Kentia Palm was known to the early islanders as the 'Thatch Palm' because the tough leaves could be used for thatching the roofs and walls of their houses. When the whaling industry declined in the 1870s, Lord Howe Island's main industry became the exportation of Kentia Palm seeds.

Kentia Palms are grown on plantations. Traditionally, once they reached maturity, the seeds were collected by a "seeder" using a circular hessian strap to climb the trunk and wrench the spikes from underneath the crown of palm leaves, they would then be shelled from their spikes, and packed for exportation. During the 1970's and 1980's, the Lord Howe

Island Board established their own onsite Kentia Palm nursery, and by 1981, palm seed exports had ceased entirely, with only live plants being shipped from the island. A group of islanders also formed an island palm growers co-operative, to which the Board agreed to sell an annual quota of its seed. Kentia palms are now one of the most popular indoor plants worldwide. International producers have emerged, which has reduced the local income from this source, although the Lord Howe Island Board and co-operative remains the largest supplier of Kentia Palm seeds in the world (Lord Howe Island Board 1988).



Figure 2. Kentia farm plantation at Lord Howe Island 1948 (Farmstead – Lord Howe Island [1948], from <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=11842607&isAv=N>)

Most islanders can trace their ancestry back to the first settlers and continue to produce resources using their traditional agricultural methods. However, the recent increases in importation and tourism have resulted in the introduction of foreign pests, including

the fruit-fly, which has affected the ability to continually farm the island. Knowledge of these traditional farming practices continues to pass down through the small community, although there is some risk that over time the knowledge and practice will be lost.

■ 2. Significance of the heritage place including natural and cultural values

World Heritage Values - Natural

The heritage significance of Lord Howe Island Group is rich and diverse. It includes places of natural and scientific value as well as cultural values.

The Lord Howe Island Group was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1982 for its Outstanding Universal Values under criteria (vii) and (x) as *"an outstanding example of oceanic islands of volcanic origin containing a unique biota of plants and animals, as well as the world's most southerly true coral reef. It is an area of spectacular and scenic landscapes encapsulated within a small land area, and provides important breeding grounds for colonies of seabirds as well as significant natural habitat for the conservation of threatened species."* (UNESCO 2017).

The assessment of the island's Outstanding Universal Value also acknowledges that it is of some cultural value as *"an interesting example of a restricted island settlement pattern;"* however, it also specifically states that the island's cultural heritage values are not considered to merit a World Heritage listing (Biosis 1998).

State Heritage Values - Natural and Cultural

Places that are considered of heritage value to the state of NSW are listed on the SHR and are administered under the NSW Heritage Act 1977. The Act defines state heritage significance as *"significance to the State in relation to the historical, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural or aesthetic value of the item."*

The Lord Howe Island Group was listed on the SHR in 1999 and was the first World Heritage listed place located in NSW. It was included on the SHR primarily for its outstanding natural values, although the state listing merely acknowledges that the island possesses cultural heritage value to the state of NSW (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage 2017).

Cultural Heritage Values

While the natural values of the island are recognized and protected via its World Heritage status, the highest level of protection of its cultural heritage value is at a state level, where the broader cultural landscape values have not

been sufficiently explored.

The island's cultural significance may not possess Outstanding Universal Value, however, it provides a cultural landscape that presents a unique example of the successful modern human settlement of a natural landscape as well as a rare insight into the development of an island community in isolation. The island also demonstrates strong community esteem in the conservation of its natural and cultural values, traditions, and lifestyle. These values should be further assessed, formalized, and protected at a state level.

■ 3. Current management arrangements (Legislations, institutions, resources)

3.1 Management of the Natural Environment

The administrative arrangements for the island are unique in Australia. The islands are administered by the Lord Howe Island Board, responsible to the NSW Minister for Environment under the Lord Howe Island Act 1953. The Board administers civic issues and is the main authority with a permanent presence on the island, although UNESCO, the Australian Department of Environment, the NSW Heritage Division, and National Parks and Wildlife Service also play roles in its management.

Tourism is currently the main economic driver on the island; however, whilst this is acknowledged by the community, there is also strong concern for the protection of the environment.

Development on the main island is strictly controlled by a Development Control Plan (DCP) and there are restrictions on who can hold leases for residential or other purposes on the island, resulting in zero population growth. The total population is strictly limited to a maximum of 360 residents, with limits on the amount of tourist accommodations capped to 400 visitors on the island at any one time. The DCP sets out appropriate building heights, styles, and setbacks as well as specifications regarding the landscaping around buildings to ensure that they recede into the landscape. These controls, which are directed towards the conservation of the natural environment, inadvertently act to also protect the island's cultural values.

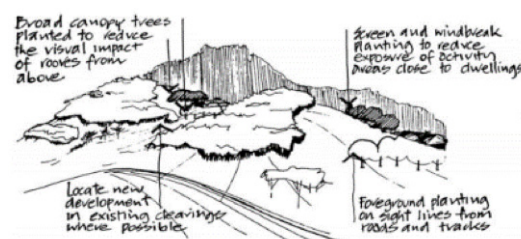


Figure 3. Development guideline diagrams from the Development Control Plan (Lord Howe Island DCP 2005, Lord Howe Island Board)



Figure 4. View of Lord Howe Island in 1910 (Hurley, Frank, 1910). [Lord Howe Island, 7] Retrieved April 10, 2017, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-157818947>



Figure 5. View of Lord Howe Island in 2016, (Roger Wong, 2016 [<http://www.flickr.com/rogerwong>])

3.2 Management of the Cultural Environment

Under the usual provisions of the NSW Heritage Act 1977, state government approval is required for any changes to a place listed on the NSW SHR. Given that the listing includes the entire group of islands, this would typically mean that any change would require state government approval. However, given that the area of cultural value is limited to the small settled area within the broader group of islands, a special provision was enacted to allow development to occur without state government approval, unless the site has been identified as an item of cultural value by the Lord Howe Island Board.

This approach is beneficial in that it reduces the various levels of regulatory authority required, especially in the unsettled areas, however it is problematic in that only a small number of historic buildings are identified and protected. Any impacts to the heritage values of these places are therefore assessed in isolation rather than in the context of the broader tangible and intangible values of their surrounding cultural landscape, which has not been clearly defined.

■ 4. Current State of Conservation and Challenges for Continuity

With an early population growth from just 9 residents to over 100 residents in 1911, the island has currently reached its allowable maximum of 360 residents. As a result it has maintained extremely slow population growth over time with no further growth expected.

The strict controls surrounding tourism have led to the island being regarded as an exclusive, luxury destination. Tourist amenities, such as the airport and golf course, have removed some physical evidence of the former, predominantly agricultural, landscape but there is pressure for the ongoing development of luxury resorts as well as an increased demand for imported food and products.

However, the development of resorts has generally been comprised of high quality,

low scale, architecture that is sensitive to its environment and, today, the broader physical appearance of the island remains substantially the same as before the growth in tourism. This is largely a result of the effective restrictions and controls resulting from its World Heritage listing. Additionally, the popularity of the island generally provides a viable economy which further funds and supports conservation incentives. It also provides a lucrative market for local farmers, which benefits the continuation of traditional farming practices. However, other changes to the landscape, such as substantial new power facilities and small scale additions such as shops and offices, are generally being constructed with less regard for the aesthetic and cultural values of the island. Whilst the need to protect the natural environment is broadly recognized and respected by the community, the state heritage regulations are regarded as another layer of “red tape” that slows down the economic progress of the island.

One main concern is that the cultural heritage values of the island are only recognized and protected at a state level through its listing on the SHR. My role as a State Heritage Officer is to administer approval of development on the island that maintains its cultural heritage values. However, the current method of listing locations on the State Heritage Register is a tangible, site-based, process that only provides for the protection of individual sites. The current provisions only protect tangible links to historical occupations, such as individual historic buildings. There is a risk that important agricultural practices as well as the relationship between places, the cultural values associated with broader settings, and historic views will not be sufficiently protected unless the management of cultural heritage is strengthened to meet the rigor of the management of its natural heritage.

■ 5. Recommendations

Further research is required to understand all of the aspects of cultural heritage values associated with the island, including any

intangible and archaeological values, to ensure that the impact can be appropriately considered in light of any change. The SHR statement of significance and listed curtilage (or boundary) should be revised to acknowledge the importance of the cultural landscape, particularly in the development of human settlements and farming of the island, as well as its natural landscape.

Once established, these cultural heritage values should be integrated into one consolidated Management Plan, providing guidelines for the protection of its varying levels of cultural and natural values, and adopted by all relevant government agencies. This would ensure a consistent and linked understanding of natural and cultural values, improve cross-governmental collaboration, and provide a framework to resolve situations where there may be conflicting values.

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