

WORLD HERITAGE ADVICE NOTE: ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

18 November 2013

This Advice Note is intended to provide States Parties and other stakeholders with guidance on integrating natural World Heritage Sites within Environmental Assessments. It provides a set of **World Heritage Impact Assessment Principles (Box 2)** that can be applied to all types of Environmental Assessments, a **list of key questions to ask concerning World Heritage during the assessment (Annex 1)** as well as **step-by-step guidance (Annex 2)**.

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What are natural World Heritage Sites?

Natural World Heritage Sites are internationally recognized under the World Heritage Convention and are inscribed on the World Heritage List. They rank amongst the world's most important natural areas. The World Heritage Convention, ratified by 190 countries, provides a unique framework for securing the conservation of these exceptional places, recognized as being of Outstanding Universal Value to humanity.

These sites include many household conservation names such as the Serengeti, Galapagos, the Grand Canyon and the Great Barrier Reef, and are often a last refuge for threatened species, for example the Mountain Gorilla, Giant Panda and Orangutan. There are more than 200 natural World Heritage Sites covering over 260 million hectares, which equates to less than 1 % of the Earth's surface and over 10% of the planet's protected areas (in ha).

They represent a commitment to future generations that the international community has a duty to uphold, as embodied in Article 6(1) of the World Heritage Convention which states that "...*such heritage constitutes a world heritage for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to cooperate*¹." However, many of these unique places are increasingly faced with threats such as mining, major infrastructure projects, poaching, illegal logging, agricultural encroachment and climate change. Of the 222 natural World Heritage Sites, nearly 8% are on the List of World Heritage in Danger, 25% are affected by serious conservation issues, and the status of many sites is currently not known.

¹ See the World Heritage Convention: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>

1 Environmental Assessment – an overview

Environmental Assessments are intended to identify, evaluate, avoid and mitigate the potential environmental and social impacts of development proposals before a decision on their funding or implementation is taken. Environmental Assessments are also intended to assess alternatives to development proposals, including the ‘no project’ option, in order to recommend the least environmentally damaging, and most sustainable, option to decision-makers.

It is important to highlight that very often economically viable and feasible alternatives can be found to environmentally damaging development proposals. A detailed consideration and evaluation of alternatives can enable the identification of these economically viable options. For this reason, it is important to involve experts with World Heritage, protected area and biodiversity knowledge early on in the Environmental Assessment process, as they can work together with developers and engineers to find solutions.

The benefits of Environmental Assessments include:

- Early consideration of environmental and social issues in the project design and planning processes;
- Greater certainty for local communities and developers over future development, and greater opportunities for local communities to participate in consultation and decision-making processes; and
- The capacity to achieve better environmental and social outcomes and address cumulative impacts at the landscape scale.

2.1 The different types of Environmental Assessment

There are two main types of Environmental Assessments:

1. **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**, which applies to

policies, plans and programmes (i.e. multiple or very large projects) – SEAs have the advantage of assessing impacts at a landscape and regional scale before individual projects are decided upon. SEAs can also help to identify economically viable alternatives, for example different routes for roads, so as to avoid impacts on a World Heritage Site; and

2. **Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA)**, which applies to individual projects. Because ESIA's generally apply to individual projects they are often not well suited to assess the cumulative impacts of multiple projects (existing and planned) at a landscape scale or to identify ‘strategic’ alternatives.

Aside from SEA and ESIA, there exist a number of other environmental assessment tools with different names and differing legal requirements. All of these assessment tools are broadly similar in purpose and scope to either SEAs or ESIA's. Throughout this Advice Note, SEAs, ESIA's and other forms of environmental assessments are collectively referred to as *Environmental Assessments*.

The relationship between SEA and ESIA is shown in Figure 1. More strategic levels of assessment, such as SEAs, should inform subsequent ones, such as ESIA's. For example, an SEA for a regional or national road network can support the preparation of ESIA's for individual roads by identifying preferred road options and through the collection of data. However, the SEA will not remove the need to undertake ESIA's for the individual roads. Rather, it will provide decision-makers with a strategic overview of economically feasible road options and their different environmental and social impacts.

2.2 Environmental Assessment and land-use planning

Environmental Assessments are an integral part of land-use planning systems. Globally, these systems are evolving rapidly but sometimes present characteristics which complicate the effective integration of natural World Heritage Sites in Environmental Assessments and decision-making.

For example, many land-use planning systems have limited resources and staff capacity, there are barriers to communication across government agencies (e.g. the mining agency and the agency responsible for the World Heritage Site), processes for issuing development permits may be unclear,

stakeholder consultation processes may be limited or non-existent, and there is often a lack of information available on World Heritage procedures (e.g. the requirement to inform the World Heritage Committee of development proposals affecting, or likely to affect, World Heritage Sites).

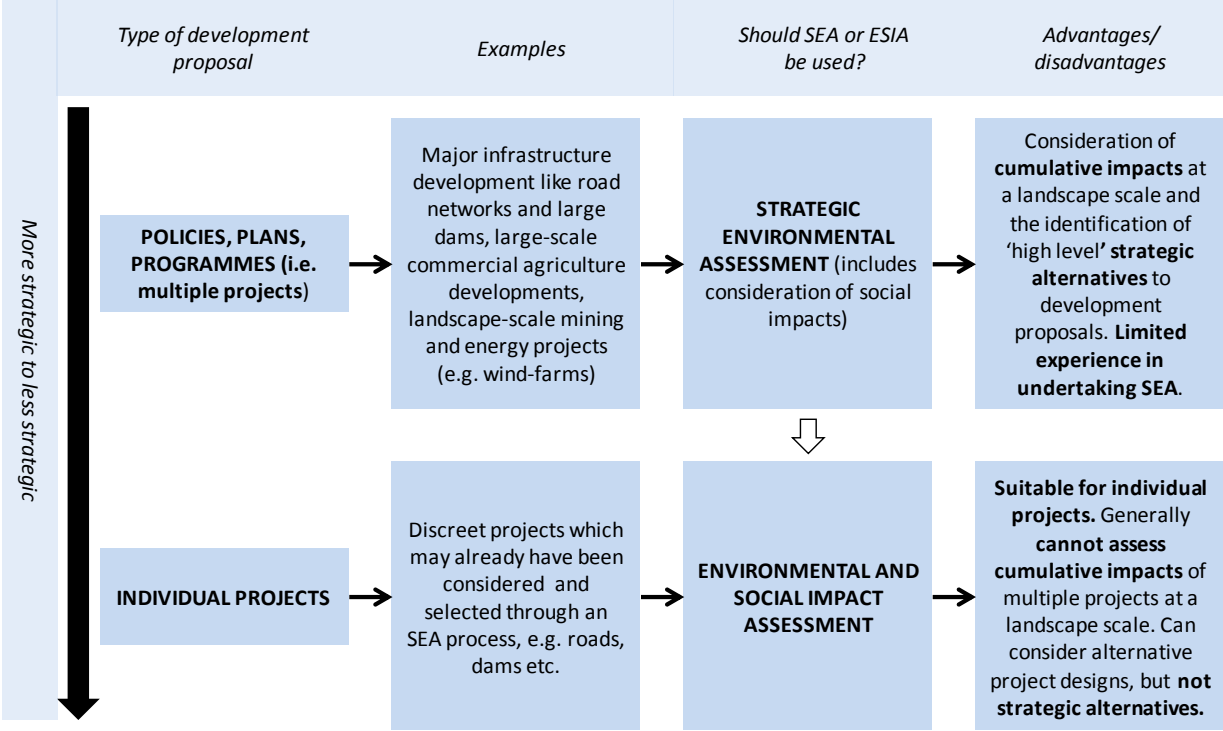


Figure 1: The relationship between more strategic levels of assessment, such as Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and project-level assessment, such as Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA).

As a first step to effective screening and integration of these sites in Environmental Assessments, all natural World Heritage Sites should be registered and identified in land-use planning information systems, along with their associated conservation and protection requirements. While this Guidance Note is intended to provide general advice on some of the points above, it does not cover the integration of World Heritage Sites within wider land-use planning systems.

3 Environmental Assessment and natural World Heritage Sites

An Environmental Assessment for a proposal affecting, or with the potential to affect, a natural World Heritage Site is intended to ensure that the proposal's likely impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of the site are fully considered in land-use planning decisions with the objective of preserving these exceptional places for future generations. The assessment should also consider the site's links with the surrounding landscape as a natural World Heritage Site cannot be considered separately from the wider ecosystem.

Outstanding Universal Value is the basis for a site's inscription on the World Heritage List and is defined in the [Operational Guidelines](#)² as "...natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity."

Its three components are values, integrity, and protection and management. These are summarized below, illustrated in Figure 2, and set out in full in the [Operational Guidelines](#). Note that a site's OUV is described in its *Statement of Outstanding Universal Value*, which can be found on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website on the site description page³.

1. **Values:** There are four natural criteria which embody the values of natural World Heritage Sites. These relate to superlative natural phenomena and exceptional natural beauty (criterion vii), earth processes (criterion viii), ecosystems (criterion ix), and threatened species and their habitats (criterion x). Note that cultural sites are recognised under criteria i-vi, and that mixed sites include both cultural and natural criteria. See Box 1 for the full wording of the natural criteria.

2. **Integrity:** Integrity is a measure of 'wholeness' and requires assessment of the extent to which the site; i) includes all elements necessary to express its values; ii) is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of features and processes which convey its significance; and iii) is not affected by developments and/or neglect.

3. **Protection and management:** Protection and management is intended to ensure that the site's values and the conditions of integrity at the time of inscription are maintained and enhanced in the future. The key elements of protection and management are; i) long-term legislative, regulatory, institutional and/or traditional protection; ii) delineated and appropriate

boundaries; iii) buffer zones and/or wider protection of the site from threats outside its boundaries and iv) effective management systems.

Box 1: The four natural World Heritage criteria

(vii) to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;

(viii) to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

(ix) to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;

(x) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

² See the Operational Guidelines to the World Heritage Convention: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

³ Statements of Outstanding Universal Value can be found on the site pages of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website at the following address <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>.

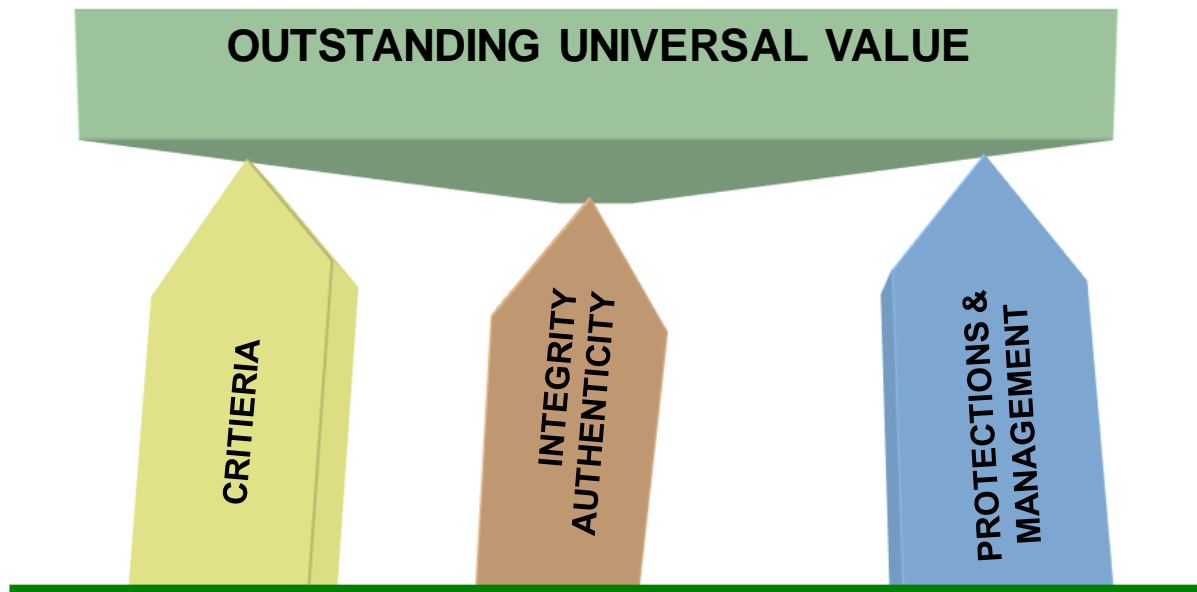


Figure 2: The three pillars of Outstanding Universal Value: criteria/values, integrity (authenticity for cultural sites) and protection and management

4 IUCN's position on Environmental Assessment for proposals affecting natural World Heritage Sites

IUCN's⁴ position is that infrastructure and other development proposals and/or concessions located within, or outside the boundaries of a natural World Heritage Site, should be considered in terms of whether they are compatible with the long-term objective of preserving the Outstanding Universal Value of the site for future generations. Those proposals that are not compatible with this objective should not be permitted within these sites. Note that most major infrastructure proposals and other large-scale development proposals are unlikely to be compatible with the preservation of a natural World Heritage Site, and alternatives should therefore be sought.

Concerning extractives, IUCN's position is that mineral and oil/gas exploration and

exploitation projects (including associated infrastructure and activities) are incompatible with the long-term objective of preserving natural World Heritage Sites for future generations and should not be permitted within these sites. Mineral and oil/gas exploration and exploitation outside natural World Heritage Sites may also have serious negative impacts on their Outstanding Universal Value and should be systematically assessed through an Environmental Assessment. For further information see the [IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Mining and Oil/Gas Projects](#)⁵.

In exceptional cases where developments affecting a natural World Heritage Site are under consideration, these should be subject to a rigorous Environmental Assessment, in line with the eight *World Heritage Impact Assessment Principles* in Box 2. In particular, reasonable alternatives to the proposal should be identified and assessed with the aim of recommending the most sustainable option to decision-makers, including in some cases the 'no project' option.

⁴ IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental network - a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries.

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http://iucn.org/about/work/programmes/wcpa_worldheritage/resources/policies/

Box 2: World Heritage Impact Assessment Principles

Principle 1: All proposals that may adversely affect a natural World Heritage Site must undergo a rigorous Environmental Assessment early on in the decision-making process, whether they are located within or outside its boundaries.

This assessment should take place as early as possible in order to provide timely and effective input to decision-makers. Assessments that take place late in the decision-making process or after the decision has been made cannot adequately inform decision-makers.

Principle 2: Experts with World Heritage, protected area and biodiversity knowledge must be closely involved in the assessment process in order to identify the issues that will need to be assessed.

These experts can also work together with developers and engineers to find alternative solutions to proposals that may adversely affect a World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value.

Principle 3: The likely environmental and social impacts of the development proposal on the site's Outstanding Universal Value must be assessed, including direct, indirect and cumulative effects.

This assessment should consider the site's values, integrity and protection and management, as well as its connection to the wider landscape, and should be based on adequate information and data.

Principle 4: Reasonable alternatives to the proposal must be identified and assessed with the aim of recommending the most sustainable option to decision-makers.

The different options should be clearly communicated to decision-makers, and those that are least damaging in relation to the site's Outstanding Universal Value should be highlighted, including in some cases the 'no project' option. Very often, economically viable and feasible alternatives can be found to development proposals that may be damaging to a World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value. A detailed and early consideration of alternatives can also help to ensure that resources are not wasted in developing proposals that are incompatible with World Heritage status (for example extractive projects).

Principle 5: Mitigation measures should be identified in line with the mitigation hierarchy, which requires first avoiding potential negative impacts and secondly reducing unavoidable residual impacts through mitigation measures.

The Environmental Assessment should outline how any minor residual negative impacts on Outstanding Universal Value that cannot be avoided will be mitigated and monitored through a budgeted Environmental Management Plan, indicating how the mitigation measures will be implemented, who will implement them within what timeframe, and what resources are secured for their implementation.

Principle 6: A separate chapter on World Heritage must be included in the Environmental Assessment.

This chapter should present clear conclusions to decision-makers on the proposal's potential impacts on a site's Outstanding Universal Value, and should be reflected in the Executive Summary.

Principle 7: The assessment must be publically disclosed and subject to thorough public consultation at different stages.

Consultation should take place at the scoping, draft Environmental Report, and monitoring report stages. All relevant stakeholders should be involved, including local communities, indigenous peoples, scientists, relevant government agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Feedback from consultation should be fully reflected and documented in the assessment.

Principle 8: An Environmental Management Plan must be proposed, implemented and independently audited.

The plan should detail operating, monitoring and restoration conditions in relation to the site's Outstanding Universal Value. The developer must set aside funds from the outset to cover the costs of independent auditing of the implementation of the Environmental Management Plan at regular intervals.

5 Applying the *World Heritage Impact Assessment Principles*

The *World Heritage Impact Assessment Principles* in Box 2 can be applied to all types of Environmental Assessments, including Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental and Social Impact Assessments. The step-by-step guidance provided in Annexes 1 and 2 provides support to States Parties and experts undertaking Environmental Assessments in applying these principles. IUCN considers that Environmental Assessments which do not meet these eight basic principles are unlikely to constitute an adequate basis for decision-making.

6 Notifying the World Heritage Committee of development proposals affecting natural World Heritage Sites

All development proposals and/or concessions that could lead to projects which may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage Site should be submitted by States Parties to the World Heritage Committee via the UNESCO World Heritage Centre⁶ (the Secretariat to the Convention). Proposals should be submitted before a decision on their funding, permitting or implementation is taken by the State Party, in line with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines* (see Box 3). Early notification is important as this offers an early and effective opportunity for engagement, and helps to ensure that resources are not wasted in developing proposals that are incompatible with the long-term protection of a World Heritage Site.

Proposals notified under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines* should be submitted together with the documentation that is available at the time of submission, e.g. project proposal, Terms of Reference for

the Environmental Assessment, Scoping Report, draft Environmental Report.

Box 3: Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*

“The World Heritage Committee invites the States Parties to the Convention to inform the Committee, through the Secretariat, of their intention to undertake or to authorize in an area protected under the Convention major restorations or new constructions which may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Notice should be given as soon as possible (for instance, before drafting basic documents for specific projects) and before making any decisions that would be difficult to reverse, so that the Committee may assist in seeking appropriate solutions to ensure that the outstanding universal value of the property is fully preserved.”

7 IUCN’s review process for Environmental Assessments

As the scientific Advisory Body on nature to the World Heritage Committee, IUCN evaluates nominations for new natural sites, monitors the state of conservation of existing sites and supports capacity building⁷. As part of its monitoring role, IUCN also reviews Environmental Assessments.

The review process for Environmental Assessments is as follows:

- The State Party submits Terms of Reference, Scoping Reports and Draft Environmental Reports to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (under Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*). These documents are then transferred to IUCN for review.
- During its review, IUCN evaluates whether the Environmental Assessment process meets the eight *World Heritage Impact Assessment Principles* outlined in Box 2 (depending on the stage which the assessment has reached). IUCN also consults its network of experts, including members of the World Commission on

⁶ Contacts for the UNESCO World Heritage Centre can be found here <http://whc.unesco.org/en/whoswho>

⁷ For more information on IUCN’s World Heritage work please see <http://www.iucn.org/worldheritage>

Protected Areas, the Species Survival Commission, IUCN Regional World Heritage Focal Points and other qualified experts.

- Once the review is complete, IUCN provides brief technical comments to States Parties to support their decision-making processes. IUCN's review is also incorporated into State of Conservation Reports, which constitute IUCN's and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre's advice to the World Heritage Committee⁸.

- Note that Draft Environmental Reports must include a separate chapter on the proposal's likely impacts on Outstanding Universal Value. If the chapter on World Heritage impacts is not included, IUCN is unable to review the report. In such cases, IUCN will consider that the assessment is not adequate and will recommend that it is amended to include this chapter, in line with the guidance provided in Annex 2, before it is re-submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN.

7.1 Commissioning an independent review for an Environmental Assessment

Independent reviews of Environmental Assessments can be commissioned through IUCN's network of environmental experts, and other appropriate and accredited independent advisers. IUCN encourages States Parties to undertake independent reviews of developments that may impact World Heritage Sites. This can be particularly valuable where Environmental Assessments have been carried out by developers, to ensure that an independent view of the quality of the assessment has been provided.

If States Parties wish to commission an independent review of an Environmental Assessment, IUCN may be able to facilitate this advice by recommending consultants or advisers who can be commissioned by the State Party (please write to whconservation@iucn.org). However, States Parties are advised that the outcomes of such a review do not constitute IUCN's official position, but the views and advice of the expert involved.

⁸ State of Conservation Reports can be accessed here <http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/>

Annex 1: Key questions to ask concerning natural World Heritage Sites at each step of the Environmental Assessment

An Environmental Assessment for a proposal affecting a natural World Heritage Site is intended to ensure that the proposal's likely impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of the site are fully considered in land-use planning decisions with the objective of preserving these exceptional places for future generations. The eight questions below are intended to support States Parties and experts undertaking Environmental Assessments in applying the *World Heritage Impact Assessment Principles*. Step-by-step guidance is provided in Annex 2.

Q. Is a proposal likely to affect a World Heritage Sites and does it require an Environmental Assessment (this includes proposals located outside the boundaries of a site)?

Q. Which issues relating to Outstanding Universal Value should be assessed and who should be involved in the assessment?

Q. What are the likely effects of the proposal on Outstanding Universal Value, including on values, integrity and protection and management, and is additional data needed?

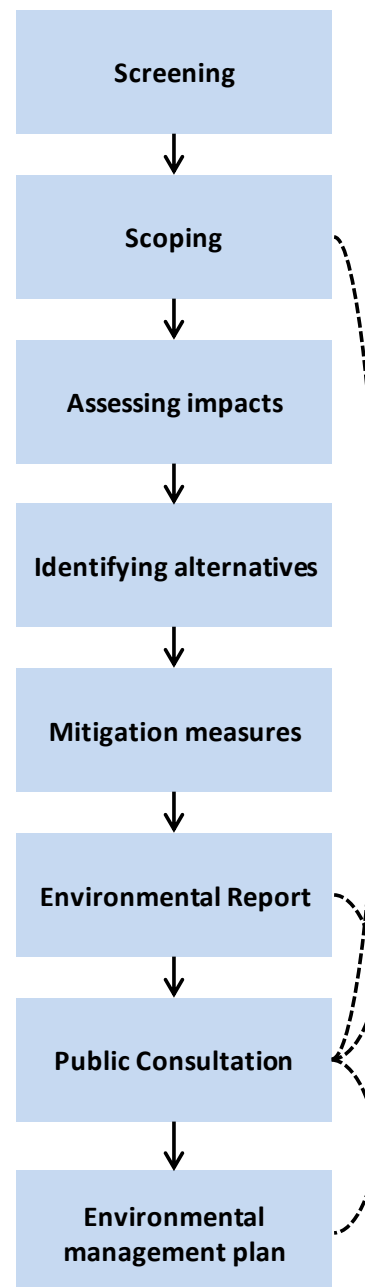
Q. What are the least damaging and most sustainable alternatives in relation to OUV and can they be implemented (including the no project option)?

Q. How will any mitigation measures be implemented, who will implement them within what timeframe, and what resources are secured for their implementation?

Q. What information should be provided to decision-makers on World Heritage impacts, when and in what format?

Q. Which stakeholders should be consulted and how?

Q. What type of plan should be implemented to manage and monitor any residual impacts on OUV by whom, with what funding and when?



Annex 2: Step-by-step guidance on integrating natural World Heritage Sites within Environmental Assessments

Step-by-step guidance on integrating natural World Heritage Sites within the eight main steps of the Environmental Assessment process is provided below (see Annex 1). This guidance is intended to support States Parties, experts undertaking Environmental Assessments and other stakeholders in applying the eight *World Heritage Impact Assessment Principles* (see Box 2). It should be used in conjunction with more detailed guidance on biodiversity impact assessment, for example the [CBD Voluntary Guidelines on Biodiversity-Inclusive Environmental Impact Assessment](#)⁹ and/or the [Ramsar Impact Assessment Handbook](#)¹⁰.

Screening – *Is a proposal likely to affect a World Heritage Site and does it require an Environmental Assessment (this includes proposals located outside the boundaries of a site)?*

1. All proposals that may adversely affect a natural World Heritage Site will require early and rigorous Environmental Assessment

Many countries have national Environmental Assessment regulations which specify different categories of projects requiring appraisal. However, all proposals which may adversely affect a natural World Heritage Site, whether they are located within or outside its boundaries, should be subject to a comprehensive and rigorous Environmental Assessment process, such as an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) or Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), prior to considering whether to grant consents and licenses.

These Environmental Assessments should take place as early as possible in the decision-making process in order to provide timely and effective input to decision-makers. Assessments that take place late in the decision-making process or after the decision has been made cannot adequately inform decision-makers.

2. Proposals located outside World Heritage Site boundaries should also be assessed

Development proposals located outside the boundaries of a World Heritage Site may have serious negative impacts on Outstanding Universal Value depending on the nature and scale of the proposals. For example, a mining proposal located 30km away from a site may, depending on the terrain, have significant and long-term implications for the hydrology of a site and also cause secondary effects, such as demographic changes leading to unsustainable natural resource use (e.g. illegal hunting). World Heritage Sites, like other protected areas, are integral to the wider landscape and cannot be considered independently from wider ecosystem processes.

⁹ See <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/imp-bio-eia-and-sea.pdf>, CBD Voluntary Guidelines on biodiversity-inclusive environmental impact assessment

¹⁰ See <http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/lib/hbk4-16.pdf>, Ramsar Handbook 16: Impact Assessment

3. Strategic Environmental Assessments should be systematically undertaken for large-scale or multi-sectoral development proposals

IUCN strongly recommends that Strategic Environmental Assessments are undertaken for large-scale proposals, proposals comprised of multiple projects or landscape-scale land use proposals (e.g. large dams, multiple road development proposals, and large-scale commercial agriculture development). The cumulative impacts of these types of proposals may have a serious negative effect on a World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value and are best assessed as early as possible through a process that is designed to consider 'high-level' strategic alternatives.

For example, multiple proposals for the development of a regional road network are best assessed through a single comprehensive SEA rather than through several project-specific ESIA's, which are unlikely to consider the cumulative effects of the proposals as a whole, or alternative routes for the road network. See Section 2, Figure 1 for more detail on the differences between SEA and ESIA.

4. Mining and oil/gas projects are incompatible with World Heritage status

IUCN has a clear position on mineral resources and protected areas, as defined by its Members (see the [IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Mining and Oil/Gas Projects](#)¹¹). It is also important to note that on numerous occasions, the World Heritage Committee has stated that mineral and oil/gas exploration and exploitation within or affecting a World Heritage Site are incompatible with its World Heritage status, and has considered that these activities can constitute a basis for inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger, in accordance with Paragraph 180 of the Operational Guidelines to the Convention. The Committee's position is in line with the [International Council on Mining and Metals' \(ICMM\) International Position Statement on Mining and Protected Areas](#)¹², and the positions of industry leaders such as [Shell](#)¹³, and that of international investment companies such as [JP Morgan](#)¹⁴. The Committee has frequently taken these industry lead positions as benchmarks for its decisions.

Scoping – Which issues relating to Outstanding Universal Value should be assessed and who should be involved in the assessment?

5. Many of the issues that should be included in the assessment can be identified by referring to the site's *Statement of Outstanding Universal Value*.

An Environmental Assessment for a development proposal affecting a natural World Heritage Site should assess likely impacts on the site's Outstanding Universal Value, namely on values, integrity and protection and management. A site's OUV is particular to each site and is described in its *Statement of Outstanding Universal Value*¹⁵, which can be found on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website on the site description page¹⁶. The IUCN Evaluation of the site's nomination may also be helpful and can also be found on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre's website.

¹¹ http://iucn.org/about/work/programmes/wcpa_worldheritage/resources/policies/

¹² <http://www.icmm.com/our-work/sustainable-development-framework/position-statements>

¹³ <http://www.shell.com/global/environment-society/environment/biodiversity/protected-areas.html>

¹⁴ http://www.jporganchase.com/corporate/Corporate-Responsibility/document/JPMC_ESRA_Policy.pdf

¹⁵ Statements of Outstanding Universal Value can be found on the site pages of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website at the following address <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>.

¹⁶ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>

6. Social issues must also be assessed

Potential social issues that could impact a site's Outstanding Universal Value and local communities should also be carefully assessed. These should be identified in close consultation with local communities.

7. Experts with World Heritage, protected area and biodiversity knowledge should be involved early on

It is important to involve experts with World Heritage, protected area and biodiversity knowledge early on in the assessment process. These experts can help identify the issues that will need to be assessed and can also work together with developers and engineers to find solutions to proposals that may adversely affect a World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value.

8. Consultation should begin at the scoping stage and the scoping document should be publically available

Stakeholders should be consulted at the scoping stage as they can support the identification of issues that should be included in the assessment. These stakeholders may include government agencies, such as the agency responsible for World Heritage and/or protected areas, as well as non-governmental organizations, the site manager, community groups etc. Scoping documents should be publically available.

9. Development Proposals, Terms of Reference, Scoping Report should be submitted as early as possible to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre

IUCN strongly encourages early submission of Development Proposals, Terms of Reference and Scoping Reports as they offer early and effective opportunities for engagement and can help ensure that resources are not wasted in developing proposals that are incompatible with the long term protection of the World Heritage site. These documents should be submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, as per Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*¹⁷. For more information on notifying the World Heritage Centre please see Section 6.

Assessing impacts – *What are the likely effects of the proposal on Outstanding Universal Value, namely on values, integrity and protection and management, and is additional data needed?*

10. All likely effects on Outstanding Universal Value should be assessed, including direct, indirect and cumulative

An Environmental Assessment for a proposal affecting a natural World Heritage Site should assess its likely effects on Outstanding Universal Value, including direct, indirect and cumulative effects. The assessment should consider effects on values, integrity and protection and management as described in the site's *Statement of Outstanding Universal Value*, which is available on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website. The Environmental Report should present clear conclusions for these three topics and for Outstanding Universal Value overall. Potential social issues that could impact on the site's Outstanding Universal Value should also be carefully assessed.

¹⁷ Contacts for the UNESCO World Heritage Centre can be found here <http://whc.unesco.org/en/whoswho>

For detailed guidance on assessing direct, indirect and cumulative effects for please see the [CBD Voluntary Guidelines on Biodiversity-Inclusive Environmental Impact Assessment](#)¹⁸ and/or the [Ramsar Impact Assessment Handbook](#)¹⁹.

In assessing effects on Outstanding Universal Value it is important to note that World Heritage Sites, like other protected areas, are integral to the wider landscape and cannot be considered independently from wider ecosystem processes.

11. Additional data may need to be collected in order to assess likely impacts on Outstanding Universal Value

In many cases there is likely to be a significant overlap between the wider environmental issues considered in the Environmental Assessment and the World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value, which should minimize the need for additional data collection. However, it may sometimes be necessary to collect additional data in order to adequately assess a proposal's likely impacts on Outstanding Universal Value. Experts with World Heritage, protected area and biodiversity knowledge can provide valuable support in identifying the issues that will need to be assessed and additional data needs.

Identifying alternatives – *What are the most sustainable project alternatives in relation to Outstanding Universal Value and can they be implemented (including the 'no project' option)?*

12. Alternative development options should be identified and assessed, including the 'no project' option and the most sustainable options in relation to Outstanding Universal Value

The Environmental Assessment should clearly identify and evaluate alternatives to development proposals, including the 'no project' option and the least damaging options in relation to Outstanding Universal Value. Identifying, assessing, and communicating alternative development proposals is one of the most important steps in the Environmental Assessment process. The different development options should be clearly communicated to decision-makers, and those that are least damaging in relation to OUV should be highlighted, including where appropriate the 'no project' option.

Very often, economically viable and feasible alternatives can be found to development proposals that may be damaging to a natural World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value. A detailed consideration and assessment of alternatives, together with support from World Heritage, protected area and biodiversity experts, can enable the early identification of these economically viable alternatives.

Mitigation measures – *How will any mitigation measures be implemented, who will implement them within what timeframe, and what resources are secured for the implementation?*

13. Mitigation measures should be identified in line with the mitigation hierarchy, which requires first avoiding potential negative impacts and secondly reducing unavoidable residual impacts through mitigation measures.

¹⁸ See <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/imp-bio-eia-and-sea.pdf>, CBD Voluntary Guidelines on biodiversity-inclusive environmental impact assessment

¹⁹ See <http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/lib/hbk4-16.pdf>, Ramsar Handbook 16: Impact Assessment

The Environmental Assessment should outline how any minor residual negative impacts on Outstanding Universal Value that cannot be avoided by changing project design or through the 'no project' option will be mitigated and monitored through a budgeted Environmental Management Plan, indicating how the mitigation measures will be implemented, who will implement them within what timeframe, and what resources are secured for their implementation. Biodiversity enhancements should also be incorporated into plan, program, project development as a matter of course in order to enhance Outstanding Universal Value.

The Environmental Report – *What information should be provided to decision-makers on World Heritage impacts, in what format and when?*

14. A separate chapter on World Heritage impacts must be included in the Environmental Assessment report, and a summary of this chapter reflected in the Executive Summary

The World Heritage chapter should:

- i. Present clear conclusions on the likely impacts of a development proposal on a site's Outstanding Universal Value, including for both environmental and social impacts;
- ii. Based on the identification and evaluation of all alternatives, recommend a preferred proposal option, e.g. the least damaging and most sustainable proposal in relation to Outstanding Universal Value or the 'no project' option as appropriate;
- iii. Outline how any minor residual negative impacts on Outstanding Universal Value that cannot be avoided will be mitigated and monitored through a budgeted Environmental Management Plan; and
- iv. Clearly document how stakeholder views were taken into account within the assessment.

Note that a summary of this chapter must be reflected in the Executive Summary of the assessment.

15. Draft Environmental Reports should be submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre as early as possible

Draft Environmental Assessment reports should be submitted as early as possible to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, and are then forwarded to IUCN for review. If a draft Environmental Report does not include a dedicated chapter on World Heritage impacts as relates to Outstanding Universal Value, IUCN will recommend that the assessment is not adequate and that it is amended to include such a chapter, in line with the guidance provided in point 14 above, before it is re-submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN.

Public Consultation – *Which stakeholders should be consulted and how?*

16. Thorough public consultation is key

The assessment should be publicly disclosed as early as possible and subject to thorough public consultation via appropriate means, including public meetings, online, in local languages as appropriate, including at the scoping stage, at the draft Environmental

Report stage and for monitoring reports. The Environmental Report should clearly document how stakeholder views were taken into account within the assessment.

Environmental Management Plan - *What type of plan should be implemented to manage and monitor any residual impacts on Outstanding Universal Value by whom, with what funding and when?*

17. The Environmental Management Plan must relate to Outstanding Universal Value

An Environmental Management Plan (EMP) should be included in the Environmental Assessment report and should detail operating, monitoring and restoration conditions relating to the World Heritage site's Outstanding Universal Value throughout the life cycle of the proposal. The EMP should ensure that the measures necessary to assess and monitor residual adverse effects are in place and that remedial action is taken when impacts are worse than predicted.

18. The implementation of this plan should be independently audited at regular intervals

The developer should set aside funds from the outset to cover the costs of independent third-party auditing of the implementation of the Environmental Management Plan at regular intervals. This budget should be specified in the EMP and verified by regulators. The EMP and any monitoring reports should be published and publically available.