

World Heritage Convention read with World Heritage Convention Act 49 of 1999 (WHCA)

Topic: Heritage

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Introduction

The World Heritage Convention aims to promote co-operation among nations to protect heritage around the world that is of outstanding universal value and needs to be conserved and protected for current and future generations.

It is intended that, unlike the seven wonders of the ancient world, properties on the world heritage list will be conserved for all time.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) General Conference adopted the World Heritage Convention at its 17th session in Paris on 16 November 1972. The Convention came into force in 1975.

Countries that are parties to the Convention have agreed to identify, protect, conserve, and present world heritage properties for recognition and adoption as world heritage sites.

All countries who are part of the World Heritage Convention have agreed to—

- ‘adopt a general policy that aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programs’;
- undertake ‘appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage’; and
- refrain from ‘any deliberate measures which might damage, directly or indirectly, the cultural and natural heritage’ of other parties to the Convention, and to help other parties in the identification and protection of their properties.

The World Heritage Convention is administered by a World Heritage Committee, which meets annually and consists of 21 members elected from those countries that are parties to the Convention. Elections are held every two years and members are generally elected for four years.

The Committee's main tasks are to–

- **decide on the inscription of new properties on the world heritage list;**
- **discuss all matters relating to the implementation of the Convention;**
- **consider requests for international assistance;**
- **advise State parties on how they can ensure States meet their obligations under the Convention to protect world heritage properties;**
and
- **administer the World Heritage Fund.**

The Committee is supported by a small secretariat, the World Heritage Centre, which is a part of the UNESCO based in Paris, France.

The world heritage list

The Convention has established a list of properties that have outstanding universal value, called the world heritage list.

The world heritage list includes some of the world's most important cultural and natural sites: the Egyptian pyramids, Great Wall of China, Taj Mahal in India, Machu Picchu in Peru, Great Barrier Reef in Australia, Galapagos Islands in Ecuador, Kilimanjaro in Tanzania and Grand Canyon in the USA.

Sites must meet at least one of the ten selection criteria to be included on the world heritage list. Six of the ten criteria address cultural values and the remaining four address natural values.

Objectives of the Act

The World Heritage Convention Act 49 of 1999 (WHCA) incorporates the World Heritage Convention into South African law.

The WHCA provides for–

- the incorporation of the World Heritage Convention into South African law;
- the enforcement and implementation of the World Heritage Convention in South Africa;
- the recognition and establishment of world heritage sites; and
- the establishment of authorities, boards and executive staff who will be responsible for the administration of the WHCA and the world heritage sites in South Africa, including financial, auditing and reporting matters and controls.

Application of the Act and its implication to Tourism

This has universal application and is particularly applicable to the tourism industry in that it formally recognises and defines sites which have cultural or environmental significance and which are visited daily by tourists.

The WHCA applies without exception to all persons and trading entities in South Africa and, in particular, to any declared world heritage site.

Summary of the provisions of the Act

Identification and nomination of world heritage sites

The Minister of environmental affairs is responsible for the procedure, including the nomination of world heritage sites, which will be done in accordance with the WHCA, the Convention and the operating guidelines.

In this regard, a designated department must identify places of potential cultural or natural heritage and investigate the desirability of nominating such places for inclusion on the world heritage list.

Any person may submit a proposal in writing to the Department for a property in the Republic to be nominated for inclusion on the world heritage list.

A written motivation for the declaration of a place as a world heritage site must be prepared and kept by the Department in accordance with the requirements of the Convention and the operating guidelines.

On consideration of the proposal, the Minister will decide whether or not such place is to be recognised as a world heritage site.

Preparation and implementation of integrated management plans

Once a place or site has been declared as a world heritage site, the authority in charge of the site must prepare and implement an integrated management plan for the world heritage site.

The object of every integrated management plan is to ensure the protection and management of the world heritage site concerned in a manner that is consistent with the objectives and principles of the Act.

World heritage sites in South Africa



These sites have been declared world heritage sites in South Africa:

- Fossil hominid sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and environs;
- iSimangaliso Wetland Park;
- Robben Island;
- uKhahlamba/Drakensberg Park;
- Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape;
- Cape Floral Region Protected Areas;
- Vredefort Dome;
- Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape; and
- Table Mountain, Cape Town.

[Sourced from <http://whc.unesco.org/>]



WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DO NOT COMPLY?

If a world heritage site is not protected, this will result in degradation and damage to our environment.

The WHCA does not house a clause stipulating what the penalties will be in the case of any non-compliance with the Act.

Should any person damage or destroy a world heritage site or part thereof, the provisions of National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 (NEMA) would apply.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS OR CONTROLS WHICH SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED BY THE TARGET AUDIENCE TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH THE ACT

- Awareness and promotion of world heritage sites.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Regulator

The Minister is responsible for enforcing and implementing the WHCA.

Website

The convention can be viewed here:

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

Acknowledgements

- Official World Heritage List in RSS 2.0;
- Official World Heritage List in XML;
- Official World Heritage List in Google Earth (KML); and
- Official World Heritage List in Excel (XLS).