

HD The devil is in the detail of efforts to log Tasmania's forest

BY James Dyke, Lecturer in Complex Systems Simulation at University of Southampton

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What do Easter **Island**, the Grand Canyon, the Great Barrier Reef, Serengeti National **Park** and the Tasmanian Wilderness have in common? They are all [UNESCO World Heritage Sites](#).

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In order to be listed, a **site** must fulfil at least one of ten criteria. For example:

to be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.

There are currently 981 World Heritage Sites. If the Australian government gets its way then by the end of this Sunday there will be 980.

From June 15-25 the [38th Congress of World Heritage Committees](#) is meeting in Doha, Qatar. The Australian government has submitted an application to [remove the Tasmanian Wilderness](#) from the list. Why? Well let's first consider why it was on the list on the first place. UNESCO [says](#):

the Tasmanian Wilderness constitutes one of the last expanses of temperate rainforest in the world. It comprises a contiguous network of reserved lands that extends over much of south-western Tasmania including several coastal islands.

As a mixed **site** it contains outstanding elements both natural and cultural – has this changed? Has some terrible calamity befallen the area so that it has become significantly degraded? No. But it will do if it is removed from the list, because the government will then be able to grant logging licenses to corporations to work in 74,000 hectares of forest. If successful, Australia would become the first developed nation to have reversed the protected status of a forest on economic grounds.

The Australian government argues that this habitat is not pristine nor undisturbed having been affected by human activities in the past, such as selective logging. Perhaps, as it therefore does not warrant World Heritage Status, the government feels obliged to finish the job off and clear away once and for all this unique ecosystem that is hindering the nation's economic development. The [thousands of protesters](#) that gathered outside the Tasmanian parliament or who have taken to Twitter under the [#MyWorldHeritage](#) hashtag argue that only approximately 8% of the forest has been logged, and that the vast majority of the habitat is dominated by mature trees that can be considered the southern hemisphere's equivalent of the towering redwoods of North America's west coast.

But perhaps the protesters are underestimating their government. The attempt to remove World Heritage status is so transparently motivated by the interests of the billion-dollar logging economy that it could only serve to cause maximum outrage from those who value the forests for being forests rather than yet-to-be-felled towering columns of cash.

What perhaps is being missed is that another Australian World Heritage **site** is to be discussed in Doha this week; not due to be removed from the list, but to be marked as endangered. Adding a **site** to UNESCO's [shortlist of sites in danger](#) is in response to the events that:

threaten the very characteristics for which a **property** was inscribed on the World Heritage List, and to encourage corrective action.

Some nations seek to have sites within their borders added to the list in order to seek assistance in protecting them, particularly in the face of destructive armed conflicts or natural disasters. The Australian government is vigorously opposing the Great Barrier Reef being so inscribed. Why? Because as recently reported in these pages, the government's plans to develop the Abbot Point coal exporting port into the world's largest will require dredging and dumping many millions of tonnes of sediment within the reef's national **park** area. Were the reef to be listed as endangered, quite rightly UNESCO and many other organisations would want them to stop, severely curtailing the amount of coal that could be **sold** and shipped to Japan and **China**.

What better way of deflecting national and international outrage at endangering the world-famous Great Barrier Reef than attempting to remove whatever protection stands between thousands of hectares of unique Tasmanian wilderness and chainsaws? Such a proposal could never be seriously considered by UNESCO, but it gives the activists something to get agitated about and keep them otherwise occupied.

However unpleasant that sounds, the alternative is that the current Australian government's behaviour is almost entirely determined by the interests of a small number of corporations and individuals that will stop at nothing to exploit whatever natural resources can turn a profit.

If that is true then the protesters can bang their drum, roar and chant but they do not speak any language their government understands; they do not talk money.

James Dyke does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any **company** or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

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NS gnatch : Nature Conservation | gcltre : Cultural Heritage | gcat : Political/General News | gcom : Society/Community/Work | genv : Environmental News

RE austr : Australia | doha : Doha | apacz : Asia Pacific | asiaz : Asia | ausnz : Australia/Oceania | gulfstz : Persian Gulf Region | meastz : Middle East | qatar : Qatar | wasiaz : Western Asia

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