



AGREED GEOPARK ASSESSMENT PROCESS WITHIN APPROVED GEOREGIONS

The agreed Geopark Assessment Process assumes that a GeoRegion designation (**Stage 1**) has been approved in principle by appropriate land managers and LGAs based on the endorsement received from the relevant State/Territory Geological Surveys and has, or is developing an approved governance structure (e.g. if it encompasses an LGA, then LGA governance arrangements can apply; if a multi-stakeholder or a community group is involved, then a relevant governance structure and trading identity may need to be established).

Prior to commencing Stage Three, it is expected that Stage 1 and Stage 2 activities have been carried out as stipulated in the approved attached 'Guidelines for the Development of GeoRegions' also referenced at <https://bit.ly/47Nappn>

In summary,

Stage One: GeoRegion Assessment

- GeoRegion Assessment including consultation with the full range of interested or impacted community groups and a full audit of natural and cultural heritage attributes.
- Preliminary discussions with identified State/Territory based Government agencies and relevant tourism organisations.
- Endorsement from the relevant State/Territory Geological Survey, land managers and Councils.

Stage Two: Geotrail establishment

- Development of attractions, geotrail concepts, geosites and heritage etc.
- Continued consultation with stakeholders identified in the GeoRegion Guidelines.

PROPOSED STAGE THREE ACTIVITIES: NEXT STEPS

- Engage with designated representatives of the National Geoparks Reference Committee to confirm the significance and demographics associated with identified sites and landscapes in the GeoRegion.
- Confirmation of an approved governance structure (**now formally designated as the Proponent**) to manage these activities, including as appropriate the application for any available government grant funding. This body must have legal existence recognised under national or state government legislation and have a comprehensive

management plan, covering governance, development, communication, protection, infrastructure, finance, and partnership issues.

- Continuation of consultation with community groups including relevant First Nations groups for the area, environmental and heritage interest groups, having regard to the recommended requirements for compliance with any state, territory or commonwealth regulations and/or best practice guidelines.
- Consultation with the state or territory government agency¹ which may be designated as responsible for oversight of this process, to seek advice about which other agencies need to be consulted as well as determining which agency will be ultimately responsible for the submission of any final recommendation to Premier/and Cabinet relating to a potential geopark nomination. These other agencies may include environment and other planning and regional development (including tourism) agencies which can identify any special need/requirements to conform with government policies relating to planning instruments.

¹ **Note:** In the case of the Murchison GeoRegion of Western Australia, the MidWest Development Commission has agreed to take on this role.

- Review at this early stage of the UNESCO checklist and explanatory notes which are intended as a quick and easy dashboard to measure the preparedness of an aspiring geopark nominations on a regular basis <https://bit.ly/3z0JTMV> In addition, a regular review of the UNESCO 'Self-Evaluation Checklist' <https://bit.ly/4fD6z6H> will enable intending proponents to gain an appreciation of the scope of works required to be undertaken during the GeoRegion assessment process to meet any intended UNESCO nomination process.
- **Review of prevailing government policies that encourage the implementation of** measures that improve tourism sustainability practices within the area of the proposed geopark nomination.
- Refinement of self-assessment documentation to ensure that there is a sufficient level of compliance arising out of self-assessment process to meet UNESCO requirements before formally moving to lodge a proposed UNESCO Aspiring Geopark proposal.
- Application to be made, in a manner prescribed by the relevant State/Territory Government, to an **National Geoparks Reference Committee**² which will review the scope of the proposal, and whether it is suitable to be processed further (either for UNESCO consideration as a Global Geopark, or as a National/State Geopark, or as a major suite of connected geotrails), or to remain as a GeoRegion to enable further reassessment at some future time.

² **Note:** The composition of the **National Geoparks Reference Committee** (a group established by the State/Territory Government in which the geopark nomination is located) will be determined by that Government and may include a selection of specialists of the following organisations:

1. Representative of the State/Territory Geological Survey with a sound knowledge of the extent and nature of significant geoheritage within the Survey's jurisdiction.
2. Representative of Geoscience Australia with knowledge of what constitutes significant geoheritage from a global perspective (fixed-term position).
3. Representative of State/Territory Government cultural heritage department.
4. Representative of peak national cultural heritage NGO e.g. ICOMOS Australia or other nationally recognised organisation with expertise in determination of geocultural heritage considerations (fixed-term position).
5. Representatives of State /Territory Government environmental department with specialist knowledge of biodiversity and First Nations cultural heritage considerations.
6. Representative from the Australian Government agency with expertise in interfacing with UNESCO's World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme (fixed-term appointment).
7. Representative from Tourism Australia with expertise in nature-based tourism marketing.

This Committee may seek commentary from specialists (either from within Australia or overseas) with credentials as assessors or other compliance and visionary matters relating to geoparks. (1-2, flexible or fixed term).

PROPOSED STAGE FOUR ACTIVITIES (IN CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE THE PROPOSED UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK NOMINATION IS APPROVED BY THE NATIONAL GEOPARKS REFERENCE COMMITTEE)

- Based on the advisings of the **National Geoparks Reference Committee**, the Proponent finalises prescribed proposal documentation ('the application dossier') to meet UNESCO requirements for a Nomination.
- Proponent completes any specified documentation (e.g., economic benefit analysis) that may be needed to gain State/Territory Government support and approval.³
- Proponent makes formal application to the designated State/Territory Government agency to assess the Nomination proposal.
- Proponent responds to government agencies and other key community stakeholder groups as referenced by the designated agency.

- The designated agency considers proposal for approval, finalising the areal extent of the nominated area and the formal name of the Nomination, having regard to community sensitivities, and submits the Nomination to the Department of Premier/Cabinet for a decision.
- The designated State/Territory Government agency provides written advice to the Proponent of the decision of Government including whether any approved Global Geopark designation by UNESCO would be protected under State/Territory legislation. This requirement must be met because a proposed Global Geopark must be legally protected in advance of any application made to UNESCO.

³ **Note:** It is recognised that the Australian Government has already stipulated that the management and funding of UNESCO Global Geoparks needs to be a responsibility of State/Territory Governments.

PROPOSED STAGE FIVE ACTIVITIES – ASSESSMENT BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT OF ANY RECOMMENDATION MADE BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT.

- **CAVEAT: The Australian Government is the State Party to UNESCO and is responsible for any interactions with UNESCO on its treaties, conventions or programs. At this stage there is no intent by the Government, nor formal ministerial approval, for Australia to engage with the Geoparks program. The inclusion of potential stage five activities should not be considered an endorsement by the Government that any geopark assessment would be commenced.**
- Following receipt of the State/Territory Government approval for the establishment of a Geopark in its jurisdiction, the proposal is submitted by the State/Territory Government Minister to the Australian Government Minister with responsibility for heritage. This proposal must detail how the Geopark would be set up and run including funding sources, governance structure, management arrangements and any legislative protections.
- The Minister considers the proposal and whether the Australian Government supports the establishment of a Geopark in Australia.
- If the Australian Government agrees to the establishment of a Geopark, it may choose to submit the Geopark proposal to UNESCO in accordance with the UNESCO Global Geopark Application process <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383822> as well as operational guidelines for the for the UNESCO Global Geoparks program <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260675>

IMPORTANT REQUIREMENTS:

- There is a requirement for an UNESCO Aspiring Global Geopark to have traded as a single entity for a year prior to assessment by IGCP/UNESCO GGn evaluation team.

- To qualify to be nominated as an Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark, proponents must also meet the requirements set out in the following Checklist <https://bit.ly/3z0JTMV>. It should be noted that this Checklist and its Explanatory Note are not statutory documents; they are designed as a quick and easy dashboard to measure the preparedness to apply and to establish qualification as an 'Aspiring Geopark' designation. They do not replace the application file and Form A (Self-evaluation Form).
- There are associated costs (the scope of which can be sourced from UNESCO) that will need to be borne by the management body of the applying nomination. This includes the costs for an evaluation mission, as well as the revalidation missions which occur every four years. The management body of any new UNESCO Global Geopark will be asked to sign a legal disclaimer removing UNESCO from any legal or financial responsibilities over the Global Geopark or associated activities within it. Individual Global Geoparks will also be encouraged to make further contributions to the UNESCO Secretariat.

10th December 2025

ATTACHMENT

GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEOREGIONS

As an outcome of the National Geotourism Strategy, the Australian Geoscience Council Inc has recommended that groups wishing to establish potential geoparks should explore various alternative options for geotourism development, such as by first establishing GeoRegions.

In Australia, GeoRegions can be single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of geological significance are linked together around a central natural or cultural value. Their intended 'bottom-up' approach of combining conservation with sustainable development aims to involve local communities. The establishment of GeoRegions as a first exploratory step has now been accepted by the State/Territory Geological Surveys, through the auspices of the Geoscience Working Group.

It is also strongly recommended that the development of GeoRegions should include the establishment of geotrails between sites of important geodiversity, such as robust geoheritage sites, geological 'monuments' and landforms, or features recognised in state or national heritage registers.

The GeoRegion mechanism provides a framework to undertake comprehensive consultation with the full range of interested or impacted community groups (including Aboriginal communities) and to resolve any identified land-tenure conflict issues that may arise. The following provides a guide to establishing a geotourism project using this mechanism.

As a first step, a full audit of natural and cultural heritage attributes in the region is strongly recommended, as well as preliminary discussions with state-or territory-based Geological Surveys, Planning and Environment agencies, and any other designated state/territory government agencies. This early planning will help focus the work to a defined area and reduce effort by identifying localities unlikely to be suitable for geotourism purposes, having regard to land and resource management considerations.

The GeoRegion Assessment Process can be commenced by a proponent, which might include a local Council, a grouping of Councils or a Regional Development Authority, or alternatively a community or special interest group interested in geotourism development. Having completed basic scoping works, preferably including an approved tourism Destination Management Plan (DMP), the proponent now needs to seek agreement from State/Territory Government agencies to select a defined area — i.e., a GeoRegion — to be recognised as an area of special natural and cultural heritage highlighting outstanding geoheritage features within which proposed geotrails and other attractions can be developed in support of geotourism.

Stage 1: GeoRegion Assessment

The aim of this phase is to seek endorsement by way of a letter from the relevant State/Territory Geological Survey simply confirming that there is nationally or internationally significant geology in the GeoRegion. Based on this endorsement, in principle

approval should then be sought from appropriate land managers and Councils, as a way to confirm and formalise this designation.

This process should consist of early consultation with the following groups:

- relevant state/territory agencies that have land and resource management responsibilities (e.g., stock route administration, Crown Lands administration), and/or planning and environment responsibilities within the proposed GeoRegion, including the relevant Geological Survey;
- Local Councils with jurisdictional responsibilities;
- any private landowners or pastoral leaseholders to determine approval of access arrangements;
- any and all Native Title holders or applicants within the chosen area to discuss potential access and heritage concerns;
- other potential government stakeholders (e.g., those cited in any Tourism Destination Management Plan (DMP));
- other stakeholders, such as interested environmental / cultural heritage groups, mining and other primary industries, and Aboriginal community groups; and
- professional societies with expertise in elements of natural and cultural heritage.

Consultation with the local, regional, and state/territory tourism organisations should also be undertaken by any special interest group that has not already been involved in the preparation of a DMP.

Stage 2: Geotrail establishment

This phase consists of developing attractions within the GeoRegion. Potential attractions will have already been identified during the initial region audit, or through consultation with various stakeholders during GeoRegion establishment.

The works in this phase include:

- Development of geotrail concepts, geosites, and heritage sites etc., in association with affected LGA protected area and crown land management authorities. Objectives include obtaining approval for proposed routes and works, identifying any specific requirements relating to public safety and access, determining funding sources, developing geotrail maintenance arrangements, and finalising geotrail nomenclature requirements.
- Continued consultation with community groups including Aboriginal Land Councils, Native Title holders and communities, and environmental and heritage groups.
- Continued consultation with other interested environmental/heritage and Aboriginal community groups, and professional societies that have expertise in elements of natural and cultural heritage, to help develop content to meet interpretation needs.
- Consultation with local school groups with an interest in using geotrails for outdoor educational purposes, as a method to support curricular requirements.

- Continuation of consultation with land-use managers to obtain final approval for implementation of the agreed works. This will need to include an assessment of the location of any identified geological hazards.
- Consultation with the designated state/territory manager for uploading of site/geotrail location and descriptive information in the online *Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal*.

Stage 3: Next Steps

Assessment and input into the further development of established GeoRegions are the responsibility of individual States / Territories, as legislation and tenure arrangements for land access are quite different in each jurisdiction. Any group wishing to establish a geopark from within an established GeoRegion will need to make representations to the designated State/Territory government agencies to determine how a proposal can be assessed, and the types of works to be undertaken within a GeoRegion before it can be processed for approval.

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Australian Geoscience Council Inc

8 December 2023

NOTE: Guidelines approved by a meeting of the Geoscience Working Group of Australian government geoscience agencies on 27th November 2023