

AUSTRALIA'S NEW PATHWAY TO UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK NOMINATIONS

For over a decade, Australia's efforts to establish UNESCO Global Geoparks stalled, not due to a lack of world-class geology, but because there was no government-endorsed pathway for assessment. That changed decisively in late 2025.

In 2018, the Australian Geoscience Council (AGC) brought together geotourism advocates to rethink the approach. Rather than continuing to lobby for geopark recognition, the focus shifted to building a credible, government-aligned assessment process, one that respected Australia's federal system and the roles of state and territory geoscience agencies.

This shift led to the 2021 launch of the National Geotourism Strategy, alongside pilot initiatives using the concept of 'GeoRegions' in places such as the Murchison GeoRegion in WA, Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion (pictured) and Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion in NSW. GeoRegions were designed as a non-statutory, exploratory step, allowing communities and governments to assess geoheritage potential without committing to a UNESCO nomination.



A detailed critique of the value of GeoRegions as 'flexible identity frameworks delivering stakeholder informed pathways for geotourism and geoconservation' has recently been published by UTas researchers Manav Sharma and Dr Melinda McHenry and can be reviewed at <https://bit.ly/4u3eQaH>

A major milestone was achieved in November 2023, when the Geoscience Working Group representing the heads of State and Territory Geological Surveys and the Australian Government's Geoscience Australia, endorsed national guidelines for GeoRegions. Building on this, the AGC and government partners developed a formal Geoparks Assessment Process, approved in December 2025.

The process follows three key steps.

- Early consultation with government agencies, communities, and Aboriginal stakeholders.
- Independent review by a national reference committee.
- State or territory government submission for ministerial consideration.

Only after this can a nomination proceed at the discretion of the Australian Government to UNESCO.

With this framework now in place, Australia has achieved a long-sought goal: a trusted, government-backed pathway from GeoRegion to potential Global Geopark recognition.

A presentation which encapsulates why Australia needed a different pathway, its critical success factors, the next steps and a call to action can be sighted at <https://bit.ly/3P19X2D>

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13 May 2026