



GEOREGIONS FOR GEOTOURISM PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The 'highest order' of sustainable geotourism can be accommodated through the establishment of geoparks, in the same way that World Heritage Areas and national parks might be seen as the highest order of protection and enjoyment for biodiversity, culture, and geodiversity. Therefore, whilst the establishment of geoparks highlight one form of geotourism, they most definitely provide opportunities to celebrate and explore the Earth's natural features whilst also incorporating culture, protections where appropriate, and sustainability in a way that is true to the core values of all nature-based tourism in Australia.

UNESCO appreciates that each Nation State can develop its own procedures for assessing geopark proposals. In the case of Australia, the concept of establishing a GeoRegion as a strategy is only a first step for geopark proponents (e.g., regional development authorities, local government agencies, community groups, natural or cultural heritage interest groups, and, as appropriate, primary industry interest groups) to use, and is of local Australian domestic relevance only, and would fall away if a GeoRegion project supported by the relevant State/Territory Government evolves into a geopark nomination. Australian government geoscience agencies now accept the concept of GeoRegions as an essential exploratory step for proposed geopark development with approved guidelines for their establishment <https://bit.ly/47Nappn>

In Australia, GeoRegions can be single, unified geographical areas of appropriate size 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 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. 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 broad area (without any defined and formalised boundaries) and reduce effort by identifying localities unlikely to be suitable for geotourism purposes, having regard to land and resource management considerations.

It is recommended that intending proponents review at this early stage the following 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-Assessment' Form <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. Once a GeoRegion designation has been approved in principle by appropriate land managers and LGAs based on the endorsement received from the relevant State/Territory Geological Surveys, it is assumed that work within the GeoRegion can proceed under the direction of an existing or approved governance structure.

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