

## Tasmanian World Heritage nomination hits hurdle

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A 170,000 hectare extension of Tasmania's World Heritage Wilderness zone has hit a roadblock, with an international cultural conservation group insisting the area must be studied for indigenous significance before it can be protected.

The extension of the wilderness zone was a flagship element of last month's Tasmanian forest peace deal, which was designed to bring an end to decades of conflict over logging in the state's native forests.

The source of the hurdle is the International Council on Monuments and Sites, a key adviser to the World Heritage Committee, which recommended the nomination not proceed as the government needed to first study Aboriginal cultural values in the wilderness area so that detailed information can be gathered on their protection and management.

"ICOMOS does not consider that it would be appropriate to add these areas...without an understanding of the cultural attributes that they contain or an evaluation as to how these might be considered to support the Outstanding Universal Value of the property," the report said.

It has also rejected an Australian proposal to remedy the problem with a conservation report to the upcoming meeting of the UNESCO committee in Phnom Penh from June 17.

"ICOMOS does not consider that the evaluation of a minor boundary modification can be considered through the State of Conservation process or that the assessment of value can be undertaken retrospectively," it said.

The nomination, which focused on the natural values of the tall and ancient forests bordering the existing wilderness, was seen by environmentalists as the main gain from the marathon forest peace talks.

Further protection of other Tasmanian native forests was much reduced under the final agreement hammered out in the upper house of state parliament.

A separate report to the committee from the International Union for Conservation of Nature has endorsed the natural values of the nomination.

But former Liberal Senator Guy Barnett, who released the documents on Tuesday in Launceston, said ICOMOS's rejection was a damning indictment of the federal government.

"It should force the withdrawal of its submission to avoid both local and international embarrassment," Mr Barnett said.

The Federal Shadow Forests Minister, Richard Colbeck, has confirmed the Coalition is opposed to the nomination, and environmentalists are concerned an incoming Abbott government in September would drop it.

Environment Minister Tony Burke said the recommendations Mr Barnett was referring to were draft.

"The decision that will matter is the decision of the committee," Mr Burke said.

"The government had already initiated a process with traditional owner groups at identifying the cultural values referred to in the draft report, and a letter had been sent to them before this report was released.

"It's great to see that the IUCN agrees that the natural boundaries are world class."

Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association chief executive Jan Davis said ICOMOS's recommendation reflected the government's lack of consultation over what was essentially a secret nomination.

"They didn't consult the Tasmanian Aboriginal community; they didn't consult others living in those areas who have a genuine cultural link to the land; they didn't consult potential neighbours on private land," she said.