



THE VICTORIAN
GOLDFIELDS
*
WORLD HERITAGE BID

What's it all About?

Q. Will the Victorian Goldfields be World Heritage listed?

A. World Heritage experts are confident the bid stacks up, but before we can be sure there are four major steps that will need to happen:

1. We need to enter the proposal in the Australian World Heritage 'Tentative List'. This is a very important step, but in terms of listing, it is a placeholder only. It signals that the Australian Government intends to put a World Heritage nomination forward. To achieve this, the Victorian government must decide to submit an application to the Australian government, and they must decide to submit it to UNESCO's World Heritage Centre.
2. At least one year later the Australian Government can submit a nomination to the World Heritage Centre. While the Tentative List entry is relatively brief, the nomination materials are detailed and will take time to prepare.
3. The application is assessed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) – this takes around 18 months and will include a field visit by one or two ICOMOS experts.
4. The World Heritage Committee decides whether to add the Victorian Goldfields to the World Heritage List. The Committee is not 'UNESCO' but is a group of 21 countries representing the regions of the world, elected by the 195 countries that have joined the World Heritage Convention.

So, there are a lot of steps to go through before we know if we can get World Heritage listing.

Q. If the Victorian Goldfields is World Heritage listed when will / could this happen?

A. The earliest this could happen would be in 2027/28.

Q. What is this first stage – Tentative Listing?

A. The Tentative List is a placeholder only. We are working on this now. The information required for the Tentative List is relatively brief, and it can be altered if needed when the full nomination is prepared. The Tentative List entry isn't evaluated and only signals that the Australian Government considers that the proposal meets the requirements for the World Heritage List and intends to submit a World Heritage nomination in the future. It will list places that are essential to a successful World Heritage listing, and a statement about why the Victorian Goldfields can meet the very high significance threshold of Outstanding Universal Value.

Once Tentative Listing has been in place for one year, the Australian Government can submit a full nomination although there are no timing requirements beyond this minimum period. This will include what's called a 'nomination dossier' (with clear maps) and a 'management plan'. Extensive consultation with communities and stakeholders is required to develop a nomination that can be supported.

Q. I have heard this is about listing the goldfields in 15 local government areas, this will lock up a huge area.

A. What is proposed is not a 'blanket listing' of whole local government areas, but several small component areas within the larger area of the whole Victorian Goldfields. This is called a 'serial listing', which means that the nomination will consist of a number of parts or sites. If it proceeds, only a very small number of component parts within the areas that are being considered (expected to about 8-12) will be nominated. In terms of the total area of the Victorian Goldfields, a very small portion of the Victorian Goldfields will be designated, and most of the larger area will not be. And it is important to stress that World Heritage doesn't change ownership or lock up an area. See further information in later questions and answers.

Q. Why such a small area?

A. Because only the component areas (buildings, urban places, former mining areas) that can best demonstrate the justification for what is termed Outstanding Universal Value, as a collection will be put forward. Component areas must be authentic, intact and already well protected. Probably the best-known area we are investigating, which is authentic, intact and already well protected, is the Castlemaine Diggings.

Q. Why were the Castlemaine Diggings put forward by the Victorian Government for World Heritage listing 15 years ago and then rejected by the Australian Government.

A. The significance of the Castlemaine Diggings is well recognised by the Australian Government. However, in the context of a World Heritage nomination, the Australian Government assessed whether it could be nominated and decided that a single site, however significant, would not be enough to fully reflect the goldrush phenomenon for the purposes of the World Heritage List, especially when you compare it to other gold rush places around the world. There is much more to the gold rush story, and this offers an opportunity to tell more of that story globally.

Q. This will stop mining and prospecting in the goldfields and remove the Miner's Right

A. This is not the case. Large scale mining will continue but can't be allowed in any World Heritage listed site. Selected component areas will be those that are currently not being mined or have an approval to be mined. The nomination will state that prospecting will be able to continue in all areas where it is currently allowed and under the current conditions. No change is proposed. The existence of the Miner's Right, its origins, and its links to democracy are all important elements of the case to be put forward to justify World Heritage listing. Your prospecting culture and heritage will be part of this story. The continuation of prospecting and the Miner's Right are part of the living cultural heritage of the Victorian Goldfields and will be referred to in the application for listing.

Q. World Heritage listing will mean that the United Nations will take over the land.

A. Not true. World Heritage listing started in 1972, there are now 1,199 World Heritage sites in 168 countries around the world, including 20 in Australia. The UN has not taken over any World Heritage site anywhere in the world nor does it have the legal authority to do so. (Also, while UNESCO is a specialised agency of the United Nations, the UN itself has no involvement in the World Heritage Convention. All the decisions are made by the 21-member states that are elected to the World Heritage Committee for terms of four years.)

Q. The UN and UNESCO will decide what can be done on the component areas.

A. That is not the case. For each listed component area, whatever the relevant authority is now – local government, state government or national government - they will continue to be the authority that legally determines what happens with the site. The obligations arising from World Heritage listing are oriented around sustaining the heritage values for which the site/property has been recognised. The World Heritage system relies on national, state and local legal frameworks and management arrangements to ensure the long-term conservation. The World Heritage Committee, (not UNESCO), can request reports on the conservation of listed places, and can in rare situations decide to delist an inscribed property if it is not being managed, and the heritage values for which it was listed no longer exist. Three properties have been delisted in the last 50 years: one in each of Germany, Great Britain and Oman. It is important to stress that the World Heritage Committee acts as an agent of international cooperation and recognition of heritage, rather than as a police force.

Q. Why haven't we had a say in which component areas are listed? How can we have our say?

A. No sites are currently listed. Possible component areas are being investigated using available information from various sources. This includes suggestions from the PMAV in 2022 following an invitation to them. Extensive community engagement and consultation will commence in 2024 and run well into 2025 to test the component areas that experts have identified meet the high threshold for World Heritage. Information from PMAV and its members would be most welcome to ensure that information about possible component areas is accurate and able to be considered.

Q. We need funds for signage and to preserve important heritage places like monuments to miners and major gold finds.

A. We are very conscious of that. Many people and organisations have raised this with us. World Heritage listing requires that component areas are well presented, maintained and well signed. The whole idea of World Heritage listing is that the important heritage values should be shared. Anticipated outcomes of World Heritage listing include increased opportunities for funding to conserve and present component areas and greater community awareness and pride in such places and we're doing work to make this happen.

Q. Will privately owned land which has diggings running through it be included in World Heritage listing.

A. It is too early to advise on sites that may be considered in a final nomination. The Commonwealth Government (who will determine the final bid) has told us that the willingness of landowners to be part of a World Heritage nomination will be essential.

Q. Can land owned by Councils be nominated?

A. Yes, but again only after full consultation with the Council and their views are known.

Q. Why is the nomination of the Victorian Goldfields being pursued?

A. There is great pride in the living heritage of the goldfields, the cities, the towns and the mining areas. International experts have concluded that the Victorian Goldfields are the best global example of the 19th century gold rushes. They are 'unparalleled'. There is a strong desire by many people to ensure that we look after this amazing heritage and can share it with our communities and with visitors. Worldwide it has been demonstrated that World Heritage listing attracts more tourists and puts more money into local economies and supports local jobs and businesses. A strong motivation for listing is to strengthen local economies.

Check the Website for Further Information

<https://goldfieldsworldheritage.com.au/about-the-bid/>