

## UNESCO World Heritage listing *a double-edged sword*

In 1972 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation set up its World Heritage Convention to protect cultural and natural sites of outstanding value. (See 'The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area', this Issue.)

From a listing of 12 sites in 1978 the list has grown steadily and now numbers in excess of eight hundred. A visit to the various world heritage area websites reveals a stunning list of the world's treasures. No one would argue against the importance of compiling such a list.

It has been found that when a site is inscribed on to the World Heritage list there frequently follows a greatly increased number of visitors. The more widely known and appreciated a site is, the more likely its long-term survival. However, this presupposes that local and national authorities are equipped to manage visitors and their impact.

The TWWHA presents its own management challenges. It is a very large area consisting of an assemblage of extremely fragile ecosystems. Clearly, it cannot absorb unlimited numbers of visitors without irreparable damage.

The most powerful management tool is high quality information. The recently completed *Review of the Floristic Values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area* compiled by officers of the Nature Conservation Branch of the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment is a major contribution to the accumulation of this essential knowledge.

There has been disquiet when newly listed world heritage sites have rapidly become 'tourist traps' and an influx of visitors has had a detrimental effect particularly when there is insufficient information available about a particular site to enable appropriate management.

World recognition brings with it commensurate responsibility. It is very important that we as Tasmanians ensure that within the TWWHA any development is sympathetic and that the area remains undiminished as one of the world's few remaining great temperate wildernesses.

It is a massive responsibility for a small state.

