



Troubles lurkings in those hills

South Australia's beautiful Mt Lofty Ranges already offer so much - a veritable food bowl, rich cultural history, outstanding beauty and home to people and wildlife alike. A proposal to pursue World Heritage listing could build on this but there are some who fear it might restrict future development, LAUREN NOVAK reports

THE LIKELY RULES UNDER THE WORLD HERITAGE LISTING

THE major concern for farmers, tourism operators, landowners and developers is whether World Heritage listing of the Mt Lofty Ranges area will impose extra layers of rules and red tape. They want to know if they will still be able to change crops, construct new buildings, improve infrastructure or value-add to the land.

The bid for listing is still being developed so final locations or criteria for protection have not been finalised.

The group behind the bid argues it will bring economic and tourism benefits and would not impose new planning regulations as the area would remain under the control of local councils and state laws.

However, planning and heritage experts expect there would have to be some new legislation or amendments to planning codes to ensure the area is protected in line with UNESCO requirements.

The area under consideration is covered by the Alexandra, Yankalilla, Barossa, Adelaide Hills, Mt Barker and Onkaparinga councils, which all support the bid.

The Clare and Light councils have declined to be involved at this stage.

The Barossa and McLaren Vale regions are covered by character preservation laws which prevent urban sprawl and protect farmland.

University of Adelaide planning and heritage senior lecturer Paul Leadbeter said it would be likely such legislation would need to be extended to the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula regions if they were included in the final World Heritage site.

"I don't think they could say

- Likely to be allowed**
- Land division for primary production
 - Dwelling on vacant rural allotment
 - Cellar door outlet
 - Farm buildings measuring under 200 sqm
 - Alternative farming: horticulture, GM crops etc
 - Farmgate trading ie. roadside stalls
 - Small tourist facilities ie. bed and breakfast

THE CASE AGAINST

there won't be any need for any further legislative controls," he said.

"The existing laws we've got would go some way towards it but if it became a World Heritage site they might have to look at stronger planning controls to make it very clear that those areas have to remain as they are."

Given the heritage bid aims to protect a "working agricultural landscape", Mr Leadbeter said the most likely restrictions would be on developing land for housing.

"There are probably some areas where developers have bought that land up with an expectation that they're going to be able to develop it in the future," he said.

"For people who own those lands it might be more restrictive for them but there could be benefits as well."

Developments in world

- What may not be allowed**
- Large tourist facilities ie. function centre
 - Intensive horticulture activities
 - Large hydroponics buildings

- Likely to be restricted**
- Altering urban growth boundary
 - Rezoning land for rural living
 - Wind farms
 - Mining
 - Native vegetation clearing

Source: Mount Lofty Ranges Feasibility Study

heritage protected areas must undergo assessment to consider whether they will have a significant impact on the protected values of the site.

In the Mt Lofty Ranges case, these values could be agricultural production, tourism, recreation, cultural or historic values.

Opposition planning spokesman Steven Griffiths said much more information was needed about the implications of heritage listing before the Liberal Party could support the push.

He had particular concerns about any restrictions which could devalue land.

"We've got to understand the implications of all these things before we can move forward," he said.

"There's benefits but potentially there's negatives too."

A spokeswoman for Planning Minister John Rau said the State Government "has yet to consider all the implications" of World Heritage listing given the bid was in "the preliminary stages".

THE CASE FOR

WHEN a destination is granted World Heritage status, the tourists inevitably follow. Producers from the region are also usually able to raise prices.

These are among the most common benefits of World Heritage listing and could apply to South Australia's Mt Lofty Ranges, according to experts. Support is growing for a bid to have up to 150,000ha of land across the Adelaide Hills, Barossa Valley, McLaren Vale and Fleurieu Peninsula regions listed as a "working agricultural landscape".

Bid project manager Stephanie Johnston said, if successful, the SA bid would be the first time Australian farmland was recognised with World Heritage status.

Ms Johnston said the bid aimed to protect the unique and methodical way agricultural lands were laid out during

colonial settlement and the "mosaic" view that the mixture of natural scrub land, vineyards and orchards creates.

"That's one of the things that agriculture does, is create a beautiful landscape," she said.

UK expert James Rebanks, an adviser to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), has studied World Heritage sites and found they tend to attract so-called cultural tourists, who stay longer and spend more money.

Other benefits include greater international media attention and more sustainability for businesses and industry.

Mr Rebanks said major international companies were often keen to be associated with the World Heritage brand and form partnerships with

authorities in listed areas.

Securing status also provides an opportunity to re-brand an area, its produce and experiences. Quality seals can give SA products an edge in overseas markets, particularly in Asia, and reinforce the clean image of our food.

"Those behind the bid will have to lobby the Federal Government to pursue listing, which could take 10 years.

Once listed on the national register, the area comes under federal laws which impose protection obligations but also make available grants and financial support.

Opposition tourism spokesman David Ridgway said "anything that makes the area unique is positive and something tourism operators can market". However, he questioned if world heritage protection would add "another layer of regulation".

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