



SCHEME FOR RECOGNITION OF WORLD HERITAGE IRRIGATION STRUCTURES (WHIS)¹

(Deadline for submission proposal for WHIS-2026 is 31 May 2026)

1. Background

- 1.1 At the 63rd meeting of International Executive Council (IEC) held at Adelaide, Australia on 28 June 2012, President Gao Zhanyi suggested that a process for recognition of the historical irrigation structures on the lines of World Heritage Sites as recognized by UNESCO shall be initiated. Accordingly, a Task Team comprising of the following members, was set up to work out objectives, guidelines and procedures to select the historical irrigation structures. The Scheme was discussed during the meeting of WG-HIST at 65th IEC meeting. The members suggested changes in the scope of the Scheme, the present Scheme has been revised and updated to include both the old operational irrigation structures as well as structures that have primarily archival value. The Management Board (MB) at its first virtual meeting of 2018 (MB-1/18) held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 03 May 2018 decided to prefix the word 'World' to HIS as the Scheme was originally conceptualized for recognizing the individual structures forming an irrigation system, irrespective of its location.

2. Objective

- 2.1 It is proposed that a historical irrigation and/or drainage structure fulfilling the criterion laid down in this document shall be recognized as "World Heritage Irrigation Structure" (WHIS). The main objectives of recognition as a "World Heritage Irrigation Structures" are:
- (a) Tracing the history of and understanding the evolution of irrigation in the civilizations across the world.
 - (b) To select and collect information on historical irrigation structures from around the world, understand their significant achievements and gather knowledge about the unique features that have sustained the project for such a long period;
 - (c) To learn the philosophy and wisdom on sustainable irrigation from these structures; and
 - (d) To protect/preserve these historical irrigation structures

3. Scope

- 3.1 The type of the structures or facilities to be considered for recognition as World Heritage Irrigation Structures shall fulfil following criterion:
- (a) The structure shall be more than 100 years old;
 - (b) The structures shall fall under one of the following categories:
 - (i) Dams (operational largely for irrigation purpose),
 - (ii) Water storage structures such as tanks for irrigation,
 - (iii) Barrages and other water diversion structures,
 - (iv) Canal Systems,
 - (v) Old waterwheels,
 - (vi) Old shadouf,
 - (vii) Agriculture drainage structures,
 - (viii) Any site or structure functionally related to present or past agricultural water management activity.

4. Criterion

- 4.1 The structure recognized as a World Heritage Irrigation Structure should fulfill one or more of the following criterions.
- (a) The structure should represent a milestone / turning points in development of irrigated agriculture and should bear an exceptional testimony to development of agriculture and increase in food production along with the improvement of economic condition of farmers;

¹ Renamed as World Heritage Irrigation Structures (WHIS) at the 69th IEC Meeting, Canada, 2018



- (b) The structure that was ahead of its times in terms of project formulation, engineering design, construction techniques, dimensions of the structure itself, quantum of water diverted, and size of the command; [any one or more of these]
- (c) Must have made outstanding contribution to enhancing food production, livelihood opportunities, rural prosperity, and poverty alleviation in a region;
- (d) Was innovative in its ideas at the time of its construction;
- (e) Contributed to the evolution of efficient and contemporary engineering theories and practices;
- (f) Is an example of attention to environmental aspects in its design and construction;
- (g) Was an example of engineering marvel or excellence at the time of its construction;
- (h) Was unique in some positive and constructive way;
- (i) Bears the stamp of a cultural tradition or a civilization of past the past;

4.2 The structures fulfilling the above laid criterion will be classified into Lists:

- (a) List A would include those structures which are still operational and present an outstanding example of sustainable Operation & Management over a long period of time;
- (b) List B would include those structures which essentially have archival value and are no more functional

5. What does list as an ICID World Heritage Irrigation Structure mean?

5.1 The process of documentation, recognition and appropriate management of the World Heritage Irrigation Structures will benefit the irrigation and drainage fraternity as well as the society in general by providing:

- (a) Understanding of the factors that make the heritage structures sustainable and learn lessons there from;
- (b) Education opportunity for professionals, students and general public; and

5.2 For UNESCO World Heritage Sites, inclusion means maintaining status quo forever. But it would be incorrect to stipulate the same for irrigation structure, as the people have the right to replace older structure with more efficient ones for better water use efficiency. Recognition as an WHIS would be used to draw attention of the concerned governments to provide sufficient resources to maintain the WHISs. ICID may provide small scale technical guidance to the project authority through a team of experts from ICID for its further sustainability, conservation and safe management as long as possible. ICID through various kinds of published material (Coffee table publications, web pages etc) should bring these WHIS into the public knowledge and the role they have played in achieving food security.

6. Procedure

6.1 A historical irrigation and drainage structure fulfilling the criterion laid under section 4, based on the recommendation of the Jury to be constituted following the guidelines, as presented below, will be approved by the International Executive Council to be recognized as World Heritage Irrigation Structure (WHIS) that will be included in an "ICID Register of World Heritage Irrigation Structures" and presenting a "World Heritage Irrigation Structure" Plaque citing the salient features of the WHIS. The Plaque will be awarded to the National Committees for onward transmission to the authorities responsible for the running and maintenance of the structure for displaying prominently on the body of the structure. The ICID Register of WHIS would be publicized through ICID media channels.

6.2 The National Committee should report the current status of registered WHIS site to ICID, after 5 years of registration.

6.3 Application

6.3.1 Any National Committee/Committee of ICID can nominate or send a proposal for recognizing historical irrigation structures meeting the criteria prescribed below, in the format prescribed at Annexure. The maximum entries per National Committee/Committee are limited up to four (4) in a year. The NC shall obtain a 'letter of support' from the relevant authority (ies).



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6.4 Jury

6.4.1 The President shall constitute a Panel of Judges, broadly following the composition below for adjudication with the objective to provide recognition to World Heritage Irrigation Structures:

Chairman, PCSO	- Chairman
Chairman/Ex-Chair, WG-HIST	- Member
Nominees from 3 NCs of ICID	- as Members
Secretary General, ICID	- Member-Secretary

6.5 Call for nomination

6.5.1 The nomination process for recognition of World Heritage Irrigation Structures is open ended and the National Committees desirous of submitting a nomination can fill in the required information in the Nomination Form as prescribed in Annexure A. A National Committee/Committee can submit up to four (4) nominations in a year. The nomination forms received by 30th June every year will be processed together and presented to the following Executive Council meeting after due processing.

6.6 Financial

6.6.1 ICID will seek to create a fund to meet the requirements of resources for:

- (a) Processing the applications,
- (b) Providing certain technical support to the WHIS for maintaining the structure in good condition,
- (c) Developing material for dissemination of WHIS, and
- (d) Bringing out publications based on the lessons learnt.

6.7 Contact

6.7.1 The ICID Central Office may be contacted for further information on the Recognition of WHIS,

The Secretary General, ICID
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