

Kvarken Archipelago becomes Finland's first site on UNESCO's world natural heritage list

At its meeting in Lithuania on 12 July 2006, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee accepted the nomination to include the Kvarken Archipelago on the World Heritage List. The decision will be confirmed on Sunday 16 July 2006. The Kvarken Archipelago is Finland's first Natural Heritage Site and is in addition to the six Cultural World Heritage Sites in Finland.

"I believe that the highest possible status accorded to the Kvarken will further add to the area's importance, not just locally among the people and organisations living and working in the region, but also nationally. If the experience of other World Heritage sites is anything to go by, inclusion of the Kvarken on the list will spread the recognition of the region in the world and increase visitor numbers," notes Stefan Wallin State Secretary at the Ministry of the Environment.

The Kvarken Archipelago is an extension of Sweden's "High Coast", another world natural heritage site. Together, these two areas form a complementary geological complex featuring land uplift unlike anything found elsewhere in the world.

The Kvarken Archipelago and High Coast – low lying islands and high rocky shores

The High Coast, accepted onto the World Heritage List in 2000 is characterised by steep, high rocky coasts where post-glacial land uplift is visible. The Kvarken on the other hand, is largely low-lying moraine archipelago which, at its highest point, rises only about 20 metres above sea level. Particularly impressive are the De Geer moraines formed by the continental ice sheet on the plains of Ostrobothnia.

Land uplift in the Kvarken is very intense and the archipelago is constantly changing shape. New islands emerge from the sea, bays are transformed into lakes and shipping lanes become shallower. Since the land surface increases by a hundred hectares a year, these changes can be noticed during one generation.

Cooperation secures the archipelago's future

The inclusion of the Kvarken Archipelago as a World Heritage site is the result of joint efforts by Finland's environmental administration and local players on the one hand and recognition of the uniqueness of the area on the other. In future, inclusion on the World Heritage List can be utilised to sustainably develop sustainable tourism or other livelihoods in the area. This will also ensure the future vitality of the archipelago.

"In future, the Kvarken can be increasingly seen not just as the everyday environment of the people who live there, but also as a valuable natural and cultural heritage resource which, fostered by tourism in the region, can be sustainably developed in the long term. Development calls for intense cooperation and a sharing of resources by local, regional and national actors alike," Wallin reminds us.

The Kvarken World Heritage site includes both private and state-own areas, some of which are nature conservation areas. A working group, whose work will be coordinated by Metsähallitus, will be set up to administer, manage, develop and market the site.

There will be an opportunity for the media to see the nature of the Kvarken Archipelago at first hand both from the land and from the sea. The press conference will be from 10am-2.30pm on Monday 17th July 2006 in Svedjehamn, Björköby (Mustasaari). Enquiries and registration: Terranova – Kvarken Nature Centre at terranova@metsa.fi, tel: +358 (0)205 64 5281.

Further information is available from

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