

Australian Heritage Strategy Project Team
Heritage Strategies
Heritage and Wildlife Division
Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and
Communities
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601

Re: Australian Heritage Strategy - Public Comments

In my capacity as the Chairperson of International Council of Museums (ICOM) Australia, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the on the issue of an Australian Heritage Strategy. As you may be aware, ICOM is an international organisation of museums and museum professionals. ICOM Australia aims to promote an Australian perspective on the conservation, continuity and communication to society of the world's natural and cultural heritage. As a non-government, non-profit body, ICOM Australia advocates:

- professional cooperation and exchange amongst museum staff,
- raising public awareness of museums,
- training of museum personnel,
- advancement of professional standards,
- elaboration and promotion of professional ethics, and
- combating the illicit traffic in cultural property.

ICOM Australia is also a founding pillar of the Australian National Committee of the International Council of the Blue Shield (Blue Shield Australia). The other Australian pillars are Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities, Australian International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the

Australian Library and Information Association. The Blue Shield is an international committee set up in 1996 to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by wars and natural disasters. The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) covers museums (including art museums and galleries), archives, libraries, monuments and sites. It brings together the knowledge, experience and international networks of the four expert organisations to advise and assist those responding to disasters which impact on cultural heritage in Australia and overseas.

As such we regard the issue of a heritage strategy with interest, and I am pleased to provide the following comments on issues raised in your discussion paper on behalf of the ICOM Australia Executive.

Who is currently involved in protecting, managing or commemorating heritage in Australia

ICOM Australia would like to draw attention to the significance of the Australian museum sector in protecting and managing heritage in Australia. Many museums are located within, and are responsible for, significant heritage buildings important at a local, national or even international level (such as Museum Victoria's World Heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building). Perhaps even more importantly, museums are major repositories for Australia's moveable heritage, and increasingly, are actively maintaining aspects our intangible heritage as well (for example through participation in the Commonwealth Return of Indigenous Cultural Property program). ICOM Australia welcomes the recognition of collections as an integral part of Australian cultural heritage within many of the essays that accompany the strategy discussion paper, and would advocate that any national heritage strategy will recognise the values of collections now held in Australian collecting institutions and community keeping places.

Are the current models of assistance effective, well directed or adequate for the task ahead?

In the last three years Australia has witnessed unprecedented floods, cyclones and bushfires and destruction from the forces of nature is becoming more frequent and with greater consequences. In response Blue Shield Australia is currently delivering a series of free regional workshops around Australia, to promote local co-operative agreements around disaster preparedness, planning, response and recovery. The aim of these workshops is to build networks, including emergency response personnel, where they do not exist presently and to examine existing network models so that they may be adapted in other regions. With disaster events likely to become more frequent in Australia due to climate change, an effective disaster response capacity will become increasingly important for all forms of heritage management. ICOM Australia advocates that disaster response capacity is recognised as a key component of any national heritage strategy.

What is Australia's role in heritage internationally and who should be contributing to this activity?

Each year ICOM Australia presents an award for international relations, which celebrates the exceptional work undertaken by individuals and Australian institutions to strengthen international ties and contribute to the cultural richness of our region. Recent winners reflect the wide impact of Australian heritage expertise, for example:

- Dr Ron Vanderwal (Museum Victoria), for his personal engagement with the people and museum collections of the Pacific region, in particular those of Fiji and the Fijian Diaspora in Australia (2009).
- Deakin University's Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, for its Lampang Temples Project focused on the implementation of an integrated approach to collections management in Lampang province in northern Thailand (2010), and

- Mr Vinod Daniel, (formerly from the Australian Museum), for his long term commitment to furthering cultural heritage preservation and management in India and for facilitating Australian-Indian cultural heritage relations (2011).

The quality of winners and nominees for the ICOM international awards provide strong evidence for comments made in the discussion paper regarding the leading role of Australian heritage experts at an international level. We also endorse comments regarding the highly influential role played by the Burra Charter, particularly across the Asia-Pacific region, where many countries lack an equivalent set of national guidelines or standards.

ICOM Australia sees a particular opportunity, through a coordinated heritage strategy, to promote the profile of the Burra Charter still further on an international stage. This could also apply to other Australian policy and significance assessment standards applicable to moveable heritage, for example Significance 2.0, or the Museums Australia code of ethics, particularly in relation to Indigenous heritage.

Australia is currently a signatory to several international conventions aimed at protecting cultural heritage, including the UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* (1970), the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972) and the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression* (2005). ICOM Australia encourages the Commonwealth to consider, as part of its national heritage strategy, becoming a signatory to two additional important conventions: the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* and the *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage*.

Finally, ICOM Australia considers that the Australian Government's international aid program represents an outstanding opportunity for this

country to take a strategic interest in heritage issues across our region, and in particular the Asia-Pacific. We recommend that the Commonwealth consider, as part of a national heritage strategy, devoting a portion of Australia's international aid program specifically to heritage issues.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Australian Heritage Strategy.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Howarth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Frank Howarth, President, ICOM Australia