

Ref:

24 January 2014

Australian Heritage Strategy  
Heritage Branch  
Department of the Environment  
GPO Box 787  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir or Madam

Thank you for the information provided in your circular dated 5 December 2013 regarding the Australian Government's announcing its commitment to completing the Australian Heritage Strategy (Strategy).

In 2011, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (Council) was invited by the Australian Heritage Council to participate in the development of the Strategy. The Council was established under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (the AH Act). Council is an expert body composed of up to eleven members who must live in Victoria, must be Victorian Traditional Owners and must have cultural heritage management expertise. The Council's key statutory functions include:

- Making decisions about applications from Aboriginal corporations to become registered Aboriginal parties (RAPs).
- Providing advice to the Minister, Secretary and others about the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- Developing measures to promote understanding and awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

In turn, the RAPs appointed by the Council exercise key statutory functions in relation to the management and protection of their cultural heritage. Consistent with the AH Act, the Council has established principles for RAP decision making that give priority to Traditional Owners. RAPs are appointed under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* for a specified geographical area over which they hold decision-making responsibilities regarding cultural heritage and land management. Their role is crucial to ensuring that Aboriginal cultural heritage is rightfully managed and protected by Traditional Owners within their appointed area.

Council's engagement with the development of the Strategy was driven by Council's chairperson at the time, Ms Denise Lovett, who was involved in several workshops in Canberra. We note your confirmation that work undertaken in part workshops and contributions made through previous submissions will be considered in the ongoing development of the Strategy. It is very important that the work undertaken previously, to which this Council has already contributed through the Australian Heritage Council, is not lost.

Council also acted as a conduit to distribute information about the development of the Strategy to RAPs and other Traditional Owners in Victoria. This is a role Council would be happy to play again as it is critical that Traditional Owners are included in these conversations. Council believes that the Traditional Owner community in Victoria should be consulted directly about the content and development of the Strategy. This includes ensuring the language and format of the Strategy are relevant to and readily understood by Victorian Traditional Owners.

Since 2011, a review of the AH Act has been completed by the Victorian Government. As well, a Parliamentary Inquiry has been completed, *Inquiry into the Establishment and Effectiveness of Registered Aboriginal Parties*, by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee of Parliament. The Victorian Government has released its responses which largely accepted the recommendations of both processes. Copies of the Government responses are attached as well as a copy of the Inquiry report, which may be found at <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/enrc/inquiries/inquiry/294>.

Council has broadly welcomed the Inquiry Report and the Government's responses and commends these to you for consideration in the further development of the Strategy.

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Yours faithfully



Maria Pizzi  
Manager, Secretariat  
Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council