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**SUBMISSION ON AN AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY**  
**TO MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT**  
**JANUARY 2014**

The Federation of Australian Historical Societies (FAHS), which represents over 1,000 historical societies and heritage groups with over 100,000 members, has undertaken an advocacy role since 1977. Over the past decade, the Federation, along with organizations such as Australia ICOMOS, Australian Council of National Trusts, and Museums Australia, has consistently advocated a national heritage strategy.

The extensive network of historical societies and heritage groups is integral to and plays a valuable role in the arts and heritage scene in Australia. It is central to community awareness and involvement in the heritage issues that underpin national identity. This contribution is not recognised sufficiently and in many Australian government announcements is not acknowledged at all.

Given the importance of the network we represent, we urge the need for the historical movement to be included in the operation of the proposed heritage strategy including formulation of policy and proposed funding arrangements, for example a national endowment fund, and its policy direction.

We note that at the outset the policy should encapsulate and confirm the concepts and aims of the *Environmental Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and state and territory cultural heritage legislation.

While the term “heritage” is very broad one and covers many different subjects and skills, in this submission FAHS has chosen to focus on the aspects closest to our constituency. We believe that movable cultural heritage should be recognised within the heritage strategy.

Accordingly FAHS believes that a national heritage strategy should

- recognize the role of local and state/territory historical societies and their museums in the new strategy. This is a fundamental requirement;
- confirm that Australia's heritage is an inheritance passed on from generation to generation. It is a living record of places, stories, objects and events that define and sustain our cultural identity in partnership with the physical landscape;
- capture the concept that heritage is a fundamental element of Australia's social capital necessary for society to sustain itself;

- value Australia's social and cultural capital by recording histories, and maintaining its built environment including transport;
- incorporate social capital in local and regional settings into policy analysis on Australia's culture and identity;
- take into account the role that all historians can play in recording, publishing and promoting cultural heritage values and built heritage;
- acknowledge that cultural tourism in urban and regional Australia stimulates economic and societal growth. These enterprises depend on the integrity of the natural and built heritage sites, which need to be valued, protected and promoted by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments;
- support the preservation of the distributed national movable heritage collection (as outlined below);
- provide appropriate financial support for the Heritage Division in the Department of the Environment and for the Australian Heritage Council; and
- provide a clearer and stronger policy and level of support for peak heritage organisations, and a higher level of support for local heritage through local government.

FAHS wishes to emphasize the potential deleterious effects of natural disasters, climate change and local development on built heritage sites, as clearly illustrated by recent natural disasters. However, many towns severely affected by flooding and cyclones have been able to retain their heritage collections because they are stored in heritage buildings (government owned) constructed at the outset of European settlement when government surveyors selected the government precincts on high ground. These outcomes have demonstrated the value of historical research as an input to planning new housing developments and community facilities.

The FAHS urges the inclusion in the strategy of pre-European heritage in Australia:

- Indigenous rock art: The Northern Territory has perhaps the finest range in the nation and it is under threat from loss of knowledge, loss of keepers, lack of maintenance, unfettered tourism and natural damage and fires. There needs to be a programme with national sponsorship that seeks to identify the more significant sites and develops appropriate methods of recording and preserving those sites.
- Macassan sites: Most of these sites are in the Northern Territory and most are under significant threat from climate change. The significance and duration of Macassan influence upon North Australia is only now being appreciated. It is urgent that a programme to identify, assess, record and where possible preserve these sites be commenced.

The FAHS is also particularly concerned that recognition and provisions to support the preservation of the distributed national movable heritage collection be included in the new heritage strategy. Volunteers in historical and other like-minded organisations across Australia are managing and preserving important local movable heritage artefacts and

document collections and taken together they include considerable material that is not represented in state and federal government museums and archives.

Digitisation of document collections preserves the collected written memory and we commend to the Australian government that digitisation be undertaken of documents in local historical museums. Development of networks and registers such as has been done with the Australian Dress Register operated through the Power House Museum are an example of mechanisms which are effective in preserving fabric in our culture.

The FAHS believes it is vitally important that the new national heritage strategy provide for competitive grants for these historical and heritage organisations to enable the proper care of those collections for the benefit of current and future generations. It should also make possible the interpretation and attractive public exhibition of items for local interest, educational and tourism purposes. The value of the current presentation of these collections to the tourism industry is quite considerable but improving the quality of their public display will certainly increase their value in that regard.

We also advocate the establishment of a Ministerial Heritage Advisory Committee similar to the National Cultural Heritage Forum which existed from the later 1990s to 2007.

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President