



TEMPLATE FOR INPUT INTO THE AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY

Overview

This template should be used to provide comments on the content of the Australian Heritage Strategy.

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Questions

Please add your comments for some or all of the questions provided with the Strategy's three high level themes below. If you have other information you wish to provide, please add this in the "Other comments" field.

1. Improve National Leadership

What are the most important things the Australian Government should be doing to offer leadership in heritage?

How can the Australian Government provide guidance and support for our national heritage—while still empowering other government, industry and community members to take responsibility and get involved?

What priority areas are important to you, your organisation or group?

What practical actions would you suggest to improve national heritage leadership?

A practical action would be for the Commonwealth to ratify the UNESCO 2001 Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage without further delay. Ratification will not require a major new policy initiative because existing legislation (i.e., the federal *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* and similar state legislation) already reflects the policy of the Convention. All that is needed are minor amendments to the Historic Shipwrecks Act (e.g., extending the reach of the Act to include all forms of UCH as defined by the Convention, etc.). Ratifying the Convention and amending the relevant legislation does impose new burdens on business and industry, does not reduce jobs, does not require new expenditures of revenue or impose new taxes. It does not require waiting for all the states and territories to agree on "model" state legislation.



2. Pursue Innovative Partnerships

What partnerships are most needed within the heritage sector?

What heritage roles and responsibilities should be led by governments, peak heritage organisations or community groups in the 21st century?

How should resources be shared through heritage partnerships to ensure the greatest return on agreed priorities?

Can you provide examples of successful innovative partnerships you or your organisation have established?

There is a need for an on-going partnership between the federal Heritage bodies and the Australian Human Rights Commission.

The federal *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (poses a significant threat to built heritage. Under certain circumstances, an historic building may be required to be modified to be fully accessible with the result that significant features of the structure are destroyed (e.g., widening doorways and corridors, raising bannisters and balustrades or altering stair treads and risers to comply with current accessibility standards often destroys rare and significant architectural details).

While the “Disability (Access to Premises — Buildings) Standards 2010” do recognise that the loss of significant heritage characteristics may amount to an “unjustified hardship”, thereby relieving an owner from liability for failing to strictly comply with the standards, the determination that such a hardship exists is made only *after* building renovations have been completed and a discrimination complaint is made to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

What is lacking is a “safe harbour” – either outright compliance exemptions for structures of recognised cultural heritage significance, such as places entered in state or Commonwealth statutory heritage registers (as is done in the US), or at the very least a clear and expeditious process by which a property owner can obtain a legally binding determination from the AHRC that specific compliance measures would be an “unjustified hardship” *before* the owner undertakes the trouble and expense of restoring a heritage property.



3. Enable encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage

What should the Australian heritage sector be doing to help the Australian community better engage in heritage activities?

How can a shared understanding of our national heritage be developed and best celebrated together?

Do you have any examples of activities that have been successful in promoting local heritage to a broader audience?

What is the role of technology and new media in providing greater community access to heritage?

The best thing the Commonwealth can do to encourage the Australian community to engage with heritage activities is to offer tax incentives to property owners who undertake conservation of heritage properties. For example the US has for many decades offered an "Historic Restoration Tax Credit" (i.e., a tax rebate) of up to 20% of the costs of conservation projects. The US National Trust has conducted studies which demonstrate that, far from being a cost to government, this tax credit has generated \$1.25 in new tax revenue for every \$1 of tax credit granted. The new tax revenue is the result of private investment in conservation projects stimulated by the tax credit. Other benefits are jobs creation and community renewal, in addition to the preservation of heritage places which continue to be performing assets rather than derelict empty buildings.

Other comments