



AUSTRALASIAN INSTITUTE FOR MARITIME
ARCHAEOLOGY Inc.

Australian Heritage Strategy Submissions
Heritage Branch
Department of the Environment
GPO Box 787
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Submission in response to the Draft Australian Heritage Strategy

The Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA) is Australia's peak organisation representing professional maritime archaeologists, SCUBA divers, historians, photographers, students, academics, historical archaeologists, and conservation scientists. AIMA works for the protection, documentation interpretation and promotion of underwater cultural heritage (UCH) in Australasia.

AIMA also plays an active role in international maritime archaeology. AIMA participated in the drafting of, and strongly supports the *UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001*. AIMA is formally accredited by UNESCO as a Non-Government Organisation member of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body (STAB) to the State Parties to that Convention. This puts AIMA in a unique and credible position as being recognised to provide the highest level of advice on the management of UCH to governments all around the world. Accordingly, AIMA sends representatives to the annual meetings of the STAB at UNESCO headquarters in Paris each year. AIMA also supports UNESCO training field schools, seminars and conferences through sponsorship, and provides technical support.

AIMA also supports the work of the International Committee for Underwater Cultural Heritage (ICUCH) with several of our members represented on the committee and holds an associate membership to the Advisory Council for Underwater Archaeology (ACUA).

AIMA welcomes the development of an Australian Heritage Strategy that underpins Australia's position as a leader in the recognition, protection, conservation and celebration of its unique cultural heritage. Our members have however, expressed their concern that the Strategy in its current form, completely ignores the key issues relevant to Australia's unique UCH. Similarly the Strategy overlooks the importance of the UCH as a significant component of Australia's cultural heritage. This is of considerable concern to the hundreds of practitioners, community groups and specialist volunteers whose efforts have underpinned the development of Australia's international reputation for excellence in management and protection of the UCH.

An Australian Heritage Strategy must demonstrate Australia's leadership in UCH by committing to ratification of the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* 2001.

The work of Australian maritime archaeologists and UCH managers in both the public and private sectors has given Australia an international reputation for leadership, innovation and excellence in protecting and managing its UCH. The Australian Government should acknowledge and celebrate this achievement and commit to maintaining Australia's world leading position by finalising the review of the pioneering, but currently outdated, *Historic Shipwrecks Act* 1976, and ultimately ratifying the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the UCH 2001. This will have many benefits in terms of the Strategy's vision and aims, such as:

- Increasing heritage policy and process alignment across all levels of government, by promoting consistency in Commonwealth and State legislation in the area of UCH (ITEM 2.a Pursue innovative partnerships - Priorities - Greater heritage policy and process alignment across all levels of government);
- applying protection to a greater range of UCH sites, not just shipwrecks (ITEM 3.d Encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage);
- bringing Australia's pioneering but now outdated UCH legislation up to international standards (ITEM 3.d- Encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage);
- building on existing management frameworks to promote greater knowledge and engagement with our heritage (ITEM 3.b - Encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage; (ITEM 2.a Pursue innovative partnerships - Priorities - Greater heritage policy and process alignment across all levels of government);
- Contributing, as an influential nation in our region, to international heritage standard setting and guidance by ratification of the UNESCO 2001 Convention. (ITEM 1.d - Commitments and proposed actions).

A great strength of maritime archaeology and UCH in Australia is the inclusion and active involvement of the public and dedicated specialised community groups in all aspects of the protection and management. In fact, the introduction of historic shipwrecks legislation in many Australian states was a direct response to the concerted and persistent efforts of the diving community and other maritime-focussed community groups to ensure Australia's significant UCH was protected from looting and conserved for the future.

While the Strategy in its current form places a strong emphasis on the Government's newly formed, and expansively funded, Green Army initiative it makes no acknowledgement or even mention of highly effective specialist community groups such as the Maritime Archaeology Association of Victoria (MAAV) or the Maritime Archaeology Association of Queensland (MAAQ) (and similar groups which exist in

each of the other states) that have assisted to establish and continue to provide skilled specialist support to maritime archaeology and UCH programs across Australia.

These groups have struggled to survive in the face of changes to funding priorities and variable focus of heritage agencies but nevertheless continue to provide active, and sometimes essential, support to UCH projects and programs both nationally and internationally.

The Australian Heritage Strategy must seize the opportunity to acknowledge and revitalise the specialised community groups that provide the skilled and dedicated volunteers critical to the ongoing and efficient management of Australia's underwater cultural heritage. Moreover, these groups should be recognised in the strategy as a vital source of expertise that will be critical in the training of Green Army and other volunteers in the specialised and relatively rare skills essential to effectively manage UCH.

AIMA's view is that it is appropriate that the Australian Heritage Strategy has a strong focus on the natural environment; however, it is unfortunate that the strategy has sidelined Australia's UCH and missed opportunities to address cultural and natural heritage issues holistically. For example: Commitment in the Strategy to establish a Reef Trust as part of the Reef 2050 plan for the long-term management and protection of the Great Barrier Reef appears to be focussed exclusively on natural heritage with no apparent consideration for long term protection and management of UCH within the Great Barrier Reef Marine World Heritage Area.

The Strategy's recognition that "Heritage work can be a complex business..." and that "The provision of good advice and guidance by the Australian, state and territory governments and professional organizations can help ensure work undertaken is effective and appropriate" is welcomed by AIMA with the observation that, in the field of UCH, state and territory governments, and professional organizations like AIMA, have struggled for the last 20 years with minimal, and fixed Federal resources to deliver, engage and form partnerships with the community to provide high quality management and interpretation of the National UCH.

This recognition must be underpinned by a corresponding commitment to the ongoing funding of the National Historic Shipwrecks Program at a sustainable level. Such a commitment is in line with all of the Strategy's goals, and will underpin the ability to deliver meaningful outcomes for Australia's vast and unique UCH.

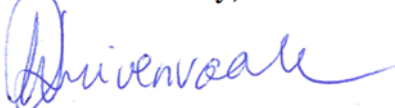
On the subject of funding, AIMA considers the proposed action; "Explore innovative approaches to fund the long term protection and management of Australia's heritage places" (p.16) to be non-committal and contrary to the theme of "improving national leadership". AIMA believes the Strategy should demonstrate leadership by firmly committing to funding for world, national and Commonwealth heritage places as a basic responsibility towards their long term preservation and sustainable management.

An inclusive and constructive Australian Heritage Strategy must acknowledge, and identify actions to recognize and progress the role of UCH as an intrinsic and unique component of Australia's heritage. To achieve this AIMA recommends the following commitments be included in the Strategy:

- Complete the 2009 Review of the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* and implement the recommended changes without further delay.
- Protect all of Australia's UCH including within Australia's waters, other states' jurisdictions and in international waters by ratifying the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage without further delay.
- Ensure sustainable, ongoing funding for the National Historic Shipwrecks Program.
- Build management capacity and leadership to assist regional countries to develop best practice in protection and management of their UCH.
- Celebrate and commit to continuing Australia's involvement in protection and capacity building for UCH in our Southeast Asian and Pacific region.

AIMA welcomes the opportunity to further engage with those drafting the Strategy to assist in the development of appropriate, sustainable, actions to achieve these commitments.

Yours sincerely,



Wendy Van Duivenvoorde
President