# Template FOR INPUT INTO THE

**AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY**

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| Overview  This template should be used to provide comments on the content of the Australian Heritage Strategy. | |
| Contact Details | |
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| **Date:** | **4 June 2014** |
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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? | |
| Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the paper ‘A Strategy for Australia’s Heritage: Draft for Consultation’, a very important draft blueprint for Australia’s future. Specifically, I would like to comment on risks to Australia’s outstanding rock art heritage, something of great concern to many Aboriginal communities and other Australians. Rock art was not mentioned in the previous draft strategy and associated online papers but I made a rock art related submission in that round. At least in this new document there is some limited mention but much more needs to be included. I will not repeat my previous submission as you have it on file but want to make some new comments focused on rock art. However, and first of all, I would like to make a few general observations and suggestions.  **General comments**   1. The key aspect of any new strategy for Australia’s heritage is that we have to move away from the piecemeal and ad hoc approaches of the past. This will mean having a strategy that all governments (national, state, territory, local councils) and communities can play a role in, a strategy that instils in governments and communities a sense of ownership, obligation, responsibility and pride. In this regard, it would be useful to begin the revised strategy document with a few paragraphs about how all our heritage (natural, Indigenous and historic) is fundamental to Australian identity and who we are as a people and nation. 2. Although national strategies of any kind are important, in reality any national strategy needs to have state, territory, region and local strategies sitting under it. In this sense it would be beneficial to start with a list of guiding principles that would underlie all other heritage strategies and also help link them together. 3. The current draft strategy document is repetitive in many sections. The revised version should avoid unnecessary duplication and be as clear and concise as possible. 4. The document should also encourage the development of specific strategies for different forms of Australian heritage as each has unique challenges and varying forms of conservation and management. For instance, Australia has never had a rock art heritage conservation and management strategy, something long overdue given the outstanding nature of this aspect of our heritage. This strategy would differ from that for buildings, natural areas, automobiles and so forth but guiding principles listed at the beginning of the general national strategy would underpin all specific strategies. With rock art, the subject of most of the rest of my submission, this would include the ‘Ask First’ principle mentioned in the draft document, among others. 5. When Australia’s heritage strategy is finalised the document should be launched with a series of short television advertisements that celebrate all aspects of our heritage and a more general campaign to raise awareness of heritage and its importance both to us today and to future generations. They should be positive with a focus on the fact that we can all have a role to play in learning from and preserving Australia’s heritage.   **Australia’s rock art heritage**  Australia has one of the most outstanding and diverse rock art records in the world – as many as 100,000 sites with paintings, drawings, prints, engravings, stencils and figures made of beeswax in rock shelters and caves, on boulders and platforms. These are special, often spectacular places that reflect ancient experience, identity, history, spirituality and relationships to land. Australian rock art, like that of most countries, faces a wide range of natural and human threats.  Natural threats, such as general weathering, water washing over surfaces, changes in exposure to sunlight, vegetation, deterioration of rock surfaces, damage by animals such as termites and mud wasps that build nests over rock art panels and other forces are difficult, if not impossible, to fully protect against. Of course, rock art was not made to last forever but in the past rock art sites were renewed in order to maintain cultural interactions with these important places and, in the process, to reaffirm individual/group identity. With changes brought about by colonisation this rarely happens today. However, Indigenous Australians are still very concerned about rock art sites and especially with how to best deal with impacts derived by human interaction with places,such as development, feral animals, road dust, unauthorised visitation, graffiti, theft, vandalism and so forth, more so than natural impacts that are harder to control. They are also more worried about human-related impacts on sites because it is these that are increasing at a rapid pace and potential damage from them now outweighs that of natural agents of change.  Although various forms of legislation make it an offence to disturb a rock art site this has not stopped a rise in graffiti (e.g. in the Pilbara as recently as May 2014), vandalism and damage from development. Current conservation methods fail because of a lack of a coordinated approach, lack of cultural context, reactionary methods, lack of training, minimal research (most of which was undertaken last century) and mismanagement. Research that addresses these issues is necessary if we are to preserve our rock art heritage for future generations.  Rock art is particularly under threat in northern Australiawhere there is a federal, state and territory government push for development – especially mining, agriculture and tourism, all of which will have huge impactson landscapes, rock art sites and cultural heritage more generally. Northern Australia is where most Australian rock art is located – where we find Australia’s oldest rock art, the best contact period rock art and a diverse range of unique forms and styles. It is estimated that there are between 60,000 – 75,000 rock art sites in northern Australia but we still do not know the extent of the art because vast areas have not been surveyed and there is no central register. Across the north previously undocumented sites are located each year, some as recently as late May 2014 in Cape York, Queensland. Development will put this outstanding heritage at risk but rock art is barely mentioned in the draft strategy. The final version of the strategy needs to flag this as an important issue so that risk to these priceless heritage sites is minimised.  Griffith University’s *Place, Evolution and Rock Art Heritage Unit* (PERAHU) has recently established a project to ensure the rock art heritage of north Queensland and the Top End of the Northern Territory is documented, conserved and managed in a way that maximises its survival in concert with development. The project does not advocate that development, including mining, not occur. Instead, actions to minimise risk to rock art should be implemented and best practice rock art research, conservation and management of this unrivalled component of Australia’s heritage should be undertaken. This would be done with the agreement and full participation of relevant Indigenous communities, creating employment in the process.  In 2013, pilot research was undertaken with the Namunidjbuk Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land, NT and the Wakaman community in far north Queensland. Funding is currently being sought from various sources for the next step that focusses on consulting with north Australian Indigenous communities to hear directly their concerns about their rock art in relation to development, the suitability of new tourism ventures and the ways in which they would like their rock art heritage both safeguarded and made accessible to future generations. This should also be a priority of the Australian heritage strategy not just for north Australia but nationally.  Such a strategy could include an awareness campaign about the importance of Australia’s rock art for all Australians, its significance for Indigenous Australians and procedures to minimise unauthorised visitation and damage to sites, among other things. Indeed, this is an opportunity for Australia to take the lead on rock art research, conservation and management best practice not only in Australia but in the world. It is an opportunity to address Indigenous concerns about heritage, to make a difference in their communities and to show the world that development can occur while at the same time maximising cultural heritage protection in easily achievable and sustainable ways.  As the draft strategy document notes, along with the ‘Closing the Gap’ strategy, ‘Indigenous communities can be empowered by building upon the strengths of Indigenous cultures and identities’ (page 17). Rock art sites are integral in this sense. A first step toward developing a rock art heritage strategy will thus involve consulting with Australian Indigenous communities about their concerns about their rock art, the suitability of current and new/proposed tourism ventures and the ways in which they would like their rock art heritage both safeguarded and made accessible to future generations. This is something I am happy to assist with. | |
| 1. **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? | |
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| 1. **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? | |
| As stated above:  When Australia’s heritage strategy is finalised the document should be launched with a series of short television advertisements that celebrate all aspects of our heritage and a more general campaign to raise awareness of heritage and its importance both to us today and to future generations. They should be positive with a focus on the fact that we can all have a role to play in learning from and preserving Australia’s heritage. | |
| **Other comments** | |
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